Articles by E. W. Rogers

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The Believer and the Future (Aug 1955)

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There is no one who would dispute the fact that the future is gloomy. The pages of this magazine are not intended to be filled with matter that can be found in any newspaper, but whether we consider things locally or at large, nationally or internationally, the prospect for the world is not rosy. The believer is not of this world, however, and it is no marvel then that he has a different hope and a brighter future with the anticipation of glory.

Paul was not a pessimist, neither did he encourage those among whom he laboured, and to whom he wrote, to be pessimists. Everywhere in his writings he fostered the constant expectation of the return of the Lord.

Look at these words taken from Romans 5:9, “We shall be saved from wrath through Him.” They might be rendered into English more literally, “We shall be saved by Him from the wrath.” The emphasis is on the words, “By Him.” He, Christ, will take the necessary action to secure our salvation from the coming wrath. The wrath referred to here is not that of the Great White Throne, its judgment and its execution. It is rather that governmental and temporal wrath which is coming upon this godless world because of its initial and persistent rejection of God’s Son.

No one can read the Old Testament, or the synoptic Gospels, or the Book of The Revelation, without discovering most clearly stated the terrible times that await this world. Particularly will this be so for the Jews.

God does not intend to allow His Son to remain unvindicated in the world in which he was so gravely dishonoured and put to death. He will miserably destroy during these terrible times those who are guilty. Such days of sorrow and tribulation there never will have been before, and although the Jew and Palestine will be the centre thereof, the repercussions will be worldwide. Nevertheless, the Lord Jesus will take such steps as to ensure that the Church which is His Body, the Bride which He loved and for which He gave Himself, the Redeemed of the Lord, will be saved by Him from the wrath.

Note in this verse 9 the two prepositions, “By” and “From.” The first suggests that He Himself, not an angel, will be the instrument or agent of our deliverance. “The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God,” (1 Thess. 4:16). Thus it will be accomplished “by Him.” He loves us so that He Himself will attend to this matter. Is it credible that the Good Shepherd Who gave His life for the sheep will leave them out in the field of this world to become victims of the relentless storm that is soon to break over it?

The second preposition is most interesting, “from.” I know that some have tried to make capital out of the fact that the preposition in 1 Thess. 1:10, is in the Greek “ek,” but this same preposition, “ek” is used of the chains falling from Peter’s hand and of Paul’s being delivered from the mouth of the lion. Did the chains fall out of Peter’s hands or merely from them? Was Paul actually in the lion’s mouth or did he escape it? No, we shall not be in the coming wrath, we shall be saved from

it. No doubt the different preposition is used because of the different word which Paul uses. In Romans 5 he says, “We shall be saved,” while in 1 Thess. 1:10, he says, “Jesus is our Deliverer, or Rescuer.” Through both of these Scriptures it is surely apparent, beyond dispute, that the believer of the present dispensation will not be in that coming wrath; he will be taken away from earth before it comes.

This passage in Romans 5:9 is plain beyond doubt, and we should never allow a difficult or less plain passage of Scripture to upset our understanding of what is plain and indubitable.

There is a tendency in some quarters to teach believers that before the Lord comes to the air for His people the Great Tribulation must take place on earth, but without going into the various matters involved in this contention, the reader should pin his faith and hope on this one plain assuring statement of Paul, “We shall be saved by Him from the wrath.”

Perhaps the reader has some doubt as to whether this wrath is not that of the future Great Judgment Day. That cannot be, for in the very first verse of this chapter we are notified that the believer has been justified by faith and he has peace with God, and that he has an access into God’s holy presence. Could he be more secure? His standing is such as makes it perfectly plain that there is not the slightest liability of his appearing in the prisoner’s dock for judgment in the last Great Judgment Day, (See John 5:24). The wrath then of verse 9 cannot refer to that, consequently it must allude to something else. To what then does it allude? Plainly, the days of trouble that are yet to visit this earth, that time called in

Scripture “The Great Tribulation.” So terrible will be the sufferings and the trials of those days that were they not shortened (that is delimitated to the last half of Daniel’s seventieth week) no flesh would be saved. Praise God, we shall be saved from it altogether, for we shall be kept out of the hour of trial that is to come on the habitable earth, (Rev. 3:10).

There will be on the earth in those days, of course, a godly remnant of which we cannot now speak particularly, but they will not form part of the Church. Some of these will lay their lives down in faithfulness to God. All of them will suffer persecution, privation, and cruelty. Even so, they will be able to utter with truth the fact, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear.” (Psa. 46:1-2).

It is essential for the believer, if he is to understand correctly what is his true and proper hope, to distinguish the dispensation, and also to make a clear distinction between the Church which is the Body of Christ and the godly remnant of Israel.

The space at our disposal does not admit of our dealing at length with the errors, as we judge, which are made by those who teach that the Church will pass through the days of the Great Tribulation, this we have endeavoured to do elsewhere.

The reader is strongly urged to pin his faith on this one plain statement and to repeat it to himself over and over again, “We shall be saved by Him from the wrath.” “We shall,” there is no doubt about it. “We shall be saved,” this must relate to the full consummation of our salvation, for our souls are already saved, it therefore

must embrace also that of our bodies. “We shall be saved by Him,” our Lord Jesus Christ, the One Who will effect this salvation by His coming into the air, and by His calling us to meet Him there. He will not employ angels or any other to do this; He himself will do it. “We shall be saved by Him from the wrath,” that is to say, He will take us to be with Himself before He pours out the vials of His wrath on earth. “The sky not the grave is our goal.” The cloudless sapphire blue of heaven is before us, not the black clouds and the thunder and the lightning of the storm of divine wrath an earth.

Get hold of it, dear brother; repeat it over and over; pin your faith to it; tell your fellow believers who would teach otherwise that this is the plank on which the foot of your faith rests and from which it cannot be moved. Look for the Lord from heaven; do not wait for the troubles upon earth.

* * *

“Keep Looking Up”

The Preacher And His Message (Feb 1956)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 2 No. 2, Feb 1956.

The preacher whom God has used in blessing to others is the one to teach us those principles which God approves. Not all who are outwardly successful can do this, but the apostle Paul can. In his letter to the Colossians he say, “Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ; Whereunto I also labour, striving according to His working which worketh in me mightily” (Col. 1:28-29). In these verses Paul states four things as to his preaching, its subject, method, purpose, and power. Let us consider these in this order.

The Subject

The subject of the apostle’s preaching was Christ, “Whom we preach.” The pronoun “Whom” should be noted for it relates to “Christ in you the hope of glory,” as seen by the preceding verse. Paul did not preach things, he preached a person, Christ. To him Christ was “all in all” (Col. 3:11). In his estimate Christ excelled all others. The Colossians were apt to be drawn away from the Lord, and to entertain an undue reverence for angels and other spiritual powers, but Paul preached Christ, not angels. He calls Him “the Son of God’s love,” “the image of the invisible God.” To the apostle, Christ was Designer, Maker, Upholder, and Heir of the visible and invisible creations, as well as the “Head of the body, the

Church." What else was worth preaching in view of such a theme.

Paul did not preach himself, for he says, "We preach not ourselves." Notable conversion as he had, that was not the chief item of his preaching, for he only used it to illustrate the power of the gospel. In many of his letters he alluded to what he was and what a difference the grace of God had made. He tells the Corinthians he was not worthy to be called an apostle seeing he had done what no other apostle had ever done; he had "persecuted the Church of God." He tells the Galatians the same, and to the Romans he recounts his experiences and inward struggles before his spiritual deliverance. To the Philippians he speaks of his zeal for the law and shows to what it led him; it made him hostile to Christ. He tells Timothy he was once a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an evil intreater. All this was secondary and only with the view of magnifying the Saviour. He did not preach himself; he merely mentioned himself to enhance the glory of his Lord. "We preach Christ crucified."

This principle should ever be borne in mind by preachers today. Beware of directing the eyes of your hearers to yourselves. Turn them to the Lord by making Him the center of every gospel message.

Some failed to do this in Paul's day, and some fail to do it today. That is why he used the emphatic pronoun "we", for both Paul and Timothy were one in this. The Preacher of the book of Ecclesiastes disappoints all who read his sermon. It is with great relief that we turn from such a sermon to the Canticles to learn of the Altogether Lovely One, the Chiefest of Ten Thousand, the One

Whom the bride calls “My Friend.” The speaker is wholly occupied with the beauties of her Beloved, so she cries, “Look not upon me.” Why should sinners look upon us? We have no innate power, nor can we supply the soul’s need; therefore, we must preach Christ.

The Method

Note the words used by Paul in our verse, “preach”, “warning”, and “teaching.” The first has to do with the public proclamation of the gospel, but the latter two have to do with individual work. Paul tells the Ephesian elders that he preached publicly and from house to house. He knew well enough that public work had not only its uses but also its limitations. It must be followed by personal work, for the market square and also the private house should each be visited. The preacher ought to be like his Lord, Who oftentimes preached to crowds by the seaside but as frequently spoke to individuals in their need. Nicodemus and the woman of Samaria are examples of this particular ministry of Christ.

Paul varied his methods. He was not always harping on one string. He was an announcer of facts concerning Christ, and informed the public of things they did not know. He followed his preaching with admonishments and warnings. He urged that Christ should be trusted and he also warned of the consequences involved if He were rejected. He also taught the believers, and instructed those recently brought to the Lord. There is progress in these words; preaching is the first step, this is followed by warning against rejecting the message, and in turn this is supplemented by teaching the converts. Paul thus showed wisdom in the manner in

which he acted; some others, it is feared, show a lack of wisdom. We should be like Jude prepared to switch from an intended message to another if we discover our theme unsuitable for our audience. In this we must be flexible and intelligent, and able to appraise people in order to assess both their needs and their capacities, and to speak as they are able to bear. Please notice the repeated use of “every”. Paul was both thorough and impartial. To him all were alike in need of Christ, no matter what other differences they might have. He knew God had looked on the heart of man and had said that all had strayed. Every man, Jew and Gentile, came within the parish of Paul. Therefore he devoted his energies, not only to the obvious derelict, but to all, without showing favour to any. God has no favourites. Let us then follow this method for it cannot be improved.

The Purpose

Paul’s aim was to present “every man full-grown in Christ.” The word “perfect” perhaps conveys the wrong idea in modern English. Paul knew that perfection will be attained only when we go to be with the Lord. He himself already had written to the saints concerning the conflict of the two natures within the believer. That conflict will not cease as long as we are in the body. His idea in this verse is that of full growth; he did not desire the converts to remain in perpetual infancy. If immaturity in the things of nature is very grievous how much more so in the things of the spirit. The sincere milk of the Word is God’s provided means of growth. We should encourage converts to feed on it. Carnality and babyhood are twins, for the presence of the one proves a person to be in the other. The Hebrew believers had

gone back, and although they should have been able to teach, they still needed to be taught. In view of the long time they had been in Christ, they should have been able to digest strong meat, instead they still needed to be fed with milk. Their growth was retarded. We cannot stand still nor mark time, we either go backward or we go forward.

Paul's eyes were ever on the future. The Judgment Seat lay ahead, and he wanted to present his converts there fully grown in Christ. This could only be accomplished as he diligently warned and taught them. Paul could not be content if it were otherwise. None less than "every man" must be presented to the Lord. None less would do for Paul, and none less should do for us. In this Paul was one with God. God Himself supplies the needs of the body, the Church, through Christ. He furnishes a constant flow of ministry through His appointed servants in order that "We all come to… a full, grown man." Read Ephesians 4:7-16, and notice the contrast drawn between the babe and the full grown man.

This particular passage in Ephesians should be placed along side Colossians 1:28, for while the former shows that God has taken the proper measures to insure the ultimate good being reached, a perfect man, corporately the Church completely developed. The latter passage shows that the apostle in harmony with the mind of God takes similar measures in his ministry to attain the same end in the case of each individual. It is to be feared that in this we also fail. We are happy to get converts but what steps do we take to instruct or admonish them? Do we give them adequate and appropriate food for the development of the life so recently received? Are they rescued from death, but left on the river's bank to the

mercy of any destructive element that may arise, or the evil intention of a passing kidnapper?

Such is the sad result of an ill-balanced ministry. It is likely to hinder all the initial work. Is it not our shame if we allow these young converts to starve? Should we not desire to see them able to walk, and more, to walk in those ways which be in Christ? How can this otherwise be if we do not teach them ? The making of disciples and teaching are the two things which the Lord joined together in His farewell commission. No one should put them asunder.

The Power

This is no easy work, for it entails labour. Please notice this word, it is stronger than work. It is even more than hard work; it is an exacting effort. Enemies have to be withstood, oppositions of men have to be resisted. Who is sufficient for these things? Paul's sufficiency, as is ours, was of God who enabled him. He laboured according to the working of Him who wrought in him in power. The secret was, "Christ in him." Paul could do all things through Christ Who strengthened him. Through Him he became a competent minister of the new covenant, an effective worker among saints and sinners. This was not through his own power or wisdom, it was the Lord operating in him.

If God is pleased to grant us spiritual children we should care for them. They will be "our glory and crown" at the Judgment Seat of Christ. What if we, through neglect, retard their development, shall we not then be ashamed before Him because of our own failure (1 John 2:28)?

It is no easy matter to give birth to spiritual children, much less is it easy again to travail in birth till Christ be formed once more in them. It is no sinecure to tend and to train them, and to nourish them in the word of faith, for it requires more strength than we have naturally or mentally, but Paul’s God is our God, and His resources are open to us today.

The secret of a peaceful life is not submission to, but delight in the will of God.

From “Elijah” by W. Fereday.

Rest (Oct 1956)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 2 No. 10, Oct 1956.

The world has been restless ever since the Fall. Is true rest, then, attainable for the Christian? If so, where and how can it be found?

Hebrews chapters three and four are devoted to the topic of rest. The writer uses a word for rest which is different from that used in Matthew 11:28. In the latter scripture, the Lord is concerned with the lifting up of burdens from others' weary shoulders; in Hebrews, with the laying down of the legal works of Judaism.

The Hebrews were engaged in a great struggle: the law tended to pull them down; Christ sought to draw them up to Himself. Which would they allow to have the mastery? Christ is superior to angels, Moses, Joshua, Aaron, and all others. There should be no doubt as to Who is entitled to the mastery, but two other forces were at work which made the issue uncertain.

These forces are named in Hebrews chapters three and four; one is "unbelief" (3:12, 19); the other is "disobedience" (Revised Version, 3:18; 4:6), meaning "unpersuasableness." Unbelief has to do with distrust of a person; unpersuasableness, with unbelief of promises, and consequent failure to act on them.

Israel was assured that the promised land would certainly be theirs. Notwithstanding the evidence, they remained unconvinced; they could not trust God to empower them to possess the land, nor to redeem His promise and give it to them. God was not trusted nor

were His Promises believed. No wonder they fell in the wilderness and failed to enter the land.

Are we totally immune to the same dangers of distrust and unpersuasableness ? Do they spoil our rest? Do we too ask, “Can God? … Can He furnish a table in the wilderness?” “Can He bring us right through our long journey to the ultimate goal?” Do we, by asking such questions, limit the Holy One with Whom we have to do, thus becoming inwardly perturbed?

The Holy Spirit speaks to us in no uncertain tone; He calls upon us “today” to listen and to exhort each other before it is too late. We must pull ourselves up immediately and not defer the issue. To “harden the heart” is a very easy thing to do; we have our MASSAHS AND MERIBAHS (Exod. 17:7) too frequently, despite the evidence in our past experience of the faithfulness of God. Why then tempt Him now?

If the heart is not right, we will not likely understand God’s ways (Heb. 3:10). We may see His acts, and find it impossible to attribute them to anything but His power, but do we know His “ways”? His acts have to do with that which is manifest; His ways relate to the principles involved, and the latter is of greater importance.

The rest spoken of in Hebrews chapters three and four is a present spiritual experience. Of course, it does not terminate at death or at the coming of the Lord, but it will be enjoyed all the more fully then. On the other hand, there are cogent reasons for rejecting the thought that the rest relates only to the future in our case, when life is past. Certainly, in Israel’s case, the rest lay at the end of the wilderness journey, but it is not so in ours.

Some of the reasons for making this statement are as follows:

1. The Christian today is both a pilgrim in the wilderness and a warrior in the land. From one point of view, he has really entered his inheritance already: hence, the rest is something to be enjoyed here and now. (Pilgrimage is prominent in Peter's epistles, and in that to the Hebrews; inheritance and warfare are prominent in Ephesians.)

2. In scripture Canaan never represents heaven, for sin and conflict were both found in Canaan.

3. Faith and rest are united in Hebrews, and what God has joined, we must not separate. As soon as there is faith, rest is enjoyed. "We which have believed do enter into that rest." Note the tense: it is present, not future.

4. Rest is a cessation from works (Heb. 4:4). The Hebrews were liable to persist in legal works and to forfeit their spiritual rest. The two cannot go together. If it is "of faith," it is "not of works." God entered into His creation rest when He ceased from His works.

5. The rest, in Hebrews, is harmony with God. "He that is entered into His rest, he also hath ceased from his own works as God did from His. Let us labour, therefore, to enter into that rest." The thought is complementary to that of Matthew 11:28; in Hebrews, it is the abandonment of the burdens of Judaistic ritualism. This rest is the enjoyment of all that has been procured for us by our Lord Jesus, who, through death and resurrection, brought to an end the Levitical ceremonial system.

Futhermore, note the emphasis laid upon the heart in this section of Hebrews. We must "keep our heart with

all diligence” lest it should go astray. There is a constant propensity to wander, but we must take care lest “we alway err in heart.” It is a grievous thing to lapse at all, but altogether a more grievous thing always to do so. Backslidings do occur, although they should not; but how tragic if they should become “perpetual” (Jer. 8:5).

These chapters in Hebrews have often caused difficulties to believers; but the writer is quite consistent with the clearly and indubitably stated doctrine of the eternal security of the child of God, when he warns us against possible failure. We must distinguish things that differ. Relationship, the result of life imparted, is not here in view; rather, the pilgrim character of the Christian. These chapters have to do with a position which we have voluntarily taken by confession (Revised Version, Heb. 3:1), as separated from the world and having started on the pilgrim journey to better things. Having thus confessed ourselves to be among the many sons who are being brought through the wilderness on the way to glory, “let us, therefore, fear lest” under the pressure of circumstances or persecution we should “seem to have come short of” God’s intended rest. In reading these two chapters,—as indeed in reading the whole epistle to the Hebrews—we must remember that the writer is taking his addressees on the ground of their profession. He does not assume that it is genuine necessarily; he would fain hope so, but they must examine themselves and “take heed.” This explains his use of the word “if” in such passages as Heb. 3:14 and elsewhere. Continuance is the proof of genuineness; apostacy is the evidence of unreality.

The argument of the writer appears to be as follows: God’s rest existed from the foundation of the world; that

is, the completion of the restorative work as detailed in Genesis 1. God rested on the seventh day, and, if we would be in communion with Him, we too must share His rest. True rest is the product of harmony with given laws; when these laws are broken, discord ensues and rest is forfeited.

Creation's rest was followed by the offer of Cannaan's rest but Israel, as a whole, failed to attain to it. They fell in the wilderness. Nor did Joshua bring them into it; enemies still remained in the land.

Later on, therefore, David is able to speak of that rest as still "remaining" available for the people of God. It still remains available for us to obtain; whether we do so depends on the condition of our heart, and on our response to His voice.

The writer speaks of the "word of God" in Heb. 4:12, referring to Ps. 95:7-11. That word is "living and operative." While Heb. 4:12 is true of the whole volume of Holy Scripture, it has special reference to the immediate context. These four verses cited from the Jewish Psalter have life and power in them; their sharp edge is surely felt by those whose hearts are not hardened; they pierce us and reveal what we are; these verses lay us bare and naked before the eyes of God. What failure and weakness they reveal! How sorely we need the help of our Great High Priest! How gracious that He is at once introduced in verse 14!

Leviticus 23 shows that rest is the goal which God has in view for HIS PEOPLE. The numeral seven speaks of it. We read there of the seventh day, the seventh week, the seventh year, and the Jubilee year at the expiry of seven sevens of years. Seven speaks of completion, attainment,

and rest. On the seventh day God rested. There is, therefore, a “sabbatismos” available for us (Heb. 4:9). This rest “remains” for the people of God, who, like Israel, have been redeemed from worse bondage and by more precious blood. We “enter” it by faith, now; only to discover that it is but the beginning of an eternal rest in fellowship with God Himself.

Assuredly it is possible for God’s pilgrims to have peace in the storm, songs in the night, joy in the prison, light in the cell. “We which believe do enter into rest.” Faith is not a blind resignation to events but a simple intelligent trust in God and His word. Faith dispels doubts and refuses to judge things by appearance. Faith rests on God, and in the Him the soul rests also.

Apostolic Writing (May 1960)

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W. E. Roger

It has sometimes been supposed that, while the utterances of the Lord Jesus are authoritative and binding on His people, those of the Apostle Paul are not. His are considered to be the mere expression of the ideas which at times he sought to impose upon the believers. This implication would have no weight with any who regard the whole of the Bible as the Word of God, which indeed it is, but it is liable to unsettle the minds of others who are not well founded in the faith.

The purpose of this paper is not to show the validity of Paul's apostleship. It is, rather, to remind the reader that Paul was aware of the authority of his writings; and that, consequently, he enjoined obedience to them on the part of the saints. It is admitted that this was not a demand for obedience accompanied with a warning of penalties in the event of disobedience, that would have been reverting to the Mosaic spirit. None the less, while disobedience to the commandments written by Paul may not entail any earthly consequences, it will inevitably entail loss at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Furthermore, it might also result in the disciplinary dealings of God even here and now.

In First Corinthians chapters 12 to 14, Paul sets out those principles and practices which should characterize the local assembly. He knew that carnal believers were likely to affirm that, for example, the restrictive commands as to women were the product of his alleged

natural antipathy to them, possibly the result of the thoughts of an embittered bachelor.

He knew also that the restrictive rules as to public speaking on the part of the men would grate on the ears of the carnally and unduly active members of the Corinthian church. He was well aware that there was even in his day, as has proved to be the case in our own time, the liability of his writings being ignored or misconstrued, or even repudiated. For that reason he said, “If any man thinketh himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him take knowledge of the things which I write unto you, that they are the commandment of the Lord” (R.V.). Note those important words, “of the Lord”; Paul was only His mouthpiece. Non-compliance with the principles stated in these chapters would be disobedience to the Lord’s own words, a much more serious matter than disobedience to an apostle.

The authority of Paul was exercised not only in regard to churches, but also in regard to individuals. Consider Acts 17:15 and Colossians 4:10. In the prosecution of Paul’s missionary efforts Silas and Timothy worked under him and were duty-bound to do as he required. This surely is the force of the word “commandment.” It does not mean that Paul rode roughshod over the private convictions of fellow-saints, especially fellow-workers, for as in the case of Apollos, he respected his private opinion and was ready to explain to the Corinthians that, although he, Paul, would have liked had Apollos gone to them, his mind at that time was not to do so. In the development of Paul’s missionary programme, it was essential that his fellow-workers should submit to his leadership.

The Colossian saints in all likelihood knew about the dispute concerning John Mark that had arisen between Barnabas and Paul. Time, nevertheless, had wrought changes in Paul's judgment. Hence he sent a "commandment" about Mark to the believers at Colosse, possibly through Epaphras. They were duty-bound, therefore, to receive him and not to allow any past failures to prejudice their welcoming him at that time.

Timothy, in like manner, was to regard Paul's first letter to him as "this commandment" (6:14) which he was to keep without spot, without reproach, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, what applies to these persons who have long since gone to their rest, applies to us in our own day and generation. Paul's writings are binding on all God's people everywhere now as much as then. Prompted by a spirit of love and devotion to our Lord, we should gladly obey what Paul wrote seeing that he was not the author but only the transmitter of the Lord's commandment.

Paul also uses another and almost synonymous word, which in the King James Version is translated "command." In the cases cited before, the word was "entole." In this case the word is "parangellia." We might almost translate it for the purpose of differentiation as "injunction." In its verbal form it is used of God, the Lord Jesus, the Apostle Peter, the Sanhedrin, the Philippian magistrates, etc. Paul uses it when speaking to the spirit of divination that possessed the damsel. He said, "I charge thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her" (Acts 16:18). Please note, "It came out that very hour." Even that wicked demon could not resist the Apostle's authoritative command.

So, too, Paul speaks with authority to those that are married, showing by this very phrase itself that he was speaking with divine authority (1 Cor. 7:10). He affirms the permanence of the marriage tie; for the Lord had before affirmed, “What God hath joined together let no man put asunder.” He employed the same word in connection with the Lord’s supper. His introductory words in this matter are, “But in giving you this charge (1 Cor. 11:17 R.V.). The word “charge” is the same as the one translated in First Corinthians 7:10 as “command.” Paul’s apostolic authority covered an extensive field. In addition to the above, it had to do with the behaviour of believers who were required by him to be quiet, to do their own business, to work with their own hands, and to walk honourably in the sight of the ungodly who observed them so that they might develop for themselves a healthy independence of all men, although not independent of God (1 Thess. 4:11-12). He had such confidence in the Thessalonians that he was sure they were both doing and would continue to do the things he commanded (2 Thess. 3:4).

Obedience to the word of the Lord sometimes brings us into circumstances that are not pleasing to the flesh and which, naturally, we would avoid. Notwithstanding, faithfulness has a first claim upon us, and we should not evade it in order to secure temporary ease. If a brother is walking disorderly and not according to the tradition handed down by Paul, he commanded the saints in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that they should withdraw from such a one. There could be no doubt as to what was orderly behaviour, for they had seen it exemplified in the conduct of Paul who wrought with labour and travail night and day to be independent of

the Thessalonian converts, and to not hinder the work of God in their souls. Indeed, when he was with them he had commanded that if any man would not work neither should he eat. That rule was still to be observed, painful as it might be. Therefore, Paul commanded them that were such that with quietness they work and eat their own bread, not sponging on the kindness of others. If they failed to do this, the rest of the saints were commanded to withdraw from them so that they might be ashamed.

That the force of this word “command,” or “charge,” or “injunction” has not been overpressed is clear in that verse 14 of this chapter states: “If any man obeyeth not our word by this epistle, note that man.” Note the word “obeyeth.” We are not entitled to exercise our own private wish, and to comply or refuse if we so desire.

The reader of this paper should refer to 1 Thessalonians 4:2 and note its context, for Paul’s authoritative command extends also to matters of personal and marital purity. He should also consider 1 Timothy 1:3-5; 4:11; 5:7; 5:18; 6:13-17. He should ponder these references, considering each one quietly and thoughtfully before finishing reading this paper. They will give him an idea of the range of Paul’s apostolic authority.

A perusal of 2 Corinthians 7:15; 10:6; and Philippians 2:12 will also prove profitable. In these passages the verb “obey” and the noun “obedience” occur. The noun is also found in Philemon 21. Paul required the saints corporately and individually to obey him, not because of personal self-importance or because he would impose his will on others, but because he was deeply aware of

the unique position he held under the Lord. He never forgot the vision on the Damascus road to which he himself had not been disobedient.

Pursuant to that vision, and in the execution of the charge then given to him, he required that fellow-workers and fellow-saints obey the communications which he handed to them from the Lord.

There is no doubt whatsoever that, were this more understood and heeded there would be less diversity of judgment in respect of many matters. It seems now-a-days that saints are far more prone to test things by the rule of expediency than by what is written. Some, indeed, affirm that the writings of Paul were designed merely to meet the temporary and local circumstances of his day, failing to recognize that Paul's writings have force at all times, and throughout all generations while the churches are on earth. Peter indeed ranks them with "other Scriptures," so that he recognized their inspiration and claim to obedience.

It is amazing what an extensive territory Paul covers! He deals with the domestic relationship of parents and children, the commercial relationship of master and servants, and the marital relationship of male and female, husband and wife. He discusses marital difficulties; he deals with church government and order, with personal manners and dress, with foods and special days, and many other things. Paul speaks with authority, but not in the same sense as did the Lord Jesus. The Lord spoke with authority, not as a commentator but as an originator; Paul, not as an originator but as a communicator.

As one moves about here and there, signs are not wanting that Paul's injunctions are either being ignored or wilfully disobeyed. Maybe it would be more charitable to suggest that younger believers are unaware of what he has written. It also may be that they have been ill-instructed touching his letters because of a failure to understand the power which his apostleship possesses.

Once the fact is grasped that obedience to what Paul writes is obedience to the commandment of the Lord who died for us and rose again, we shall be the more ready not to overlook one item but to seek help from God to comply with all. We must not allow modern customs to mislead us. Live fish go upstream which is to go the contrary way to those that are dead.

Sound Advise (Apr 1961)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 7 No. 4, Apr 1961.

It was Mary, the mother of the Lord Jesus, who gave the sound advice to the servants at the wedding feast, “Whatsoever He saith unto you do it.” How comprehensive were these words: “Whatsoever,” admitting of no reserves or exceptions: “Whatsoever He saith” was to be done unquestioningly, no matter what the command might be, no matter how seemingly strange or unusual. The servants acted on this and, lo, and behold, the water had become wine! It is ever so. When the “water of the word” is simply obeyed it will surely be followed by the “wine of joy.” Joy is the sure result of obedience.

What did He say? “Fill the water-pots with water.” But it was wine that was lacking, obviously water was plentiful for they filled them to the brim. He said “fill the waterpots” and “they filled them.” Then He said, “Draw out now and bear unto the governor of the feast.” Dare they? Would it not be offensive, to say the least, to offer water to the governor of the feast? But Mary’s rule obtained and, responding to His word to “bear,” “they bare it.” They did exactly as they were told, and the result? The best wine had been kept to the last.

This is like a seam running throughout the precious mine of John’s Gospel. It is found everywhere. The courtier’s son was sick and he applied to the Lord Jesus for help. The Lord bade him, “Go thy way, thy son liveth.” He did not demur; he did not demand His presence beside the bed of his son; he did not demand a demonstrative cure. He simply obeyed the word and

acted on Mary's injunction (though he had never heard it for himself), and "he went his way." On arrival home, he found that just what the Lord had said was true; the mending took place at the hour of his speaking.

A large hungry multitude confronts the Lord and His disciples. The available visible supplies of food were totally inadequate for such a crowd, as Andrew well knew. Philip apprehended the need. Andrew understood the total insufficiency of what was obtainable. But the Lord said, "Make the men sit down," and without doubting "the men sat down" and the result is well known. It is a golden rule that whatsoever He saith unto us, we should do.

Here is an impotent man, who had been lying at the pool of Bethesda for thirty and eight years. Jesus passes by and, getting a confession from the man of his need, his desire, and his inability; He tells him to "Rise, take up thy bed and walk," and "he took up his bed and walked." Note how John constantly shows the implementation of Mary's injunction by stating exactly what the Lord bade, and then showing in the same terms what the person did. In all such cases the wine of blessing followed; the boy was healed, the multitude was fed, and the impotent man made whole.

It was so with the blind man whose healing is recorded in chapter 9. To him the Lord spake, "Go and wash," and "he went and washed," and his tale was repeatedly told, "Once I was blind but now I can see." He did not demur at the strange action and command. There was no refusal to obey on his part, fearing lest he might prove to have been made a laughing-stock in the sight of others. In all these instances there was immediate

compliance with the command, although in each case it seemed to be such that, if the desired blessing did not follow, it would have held them all up to ridicule. In simple faith they did as they were told: it was, indeed, the obedience of faith.

Standing before the grave wherein the body of Lazarus lay, He said, “Take ye away the stone.” Martha truly did demur, explaining that decomposition would have rendered the body a putrid mass, but after the Lord had graciously met such an apparently reasonable objection, “they took away the stone,” and soon the whole three of that family were reunited and round the table, their Lord present as well.

It was so after His resurrection. He said, “Cast the net on the right side of the ship,” and “they cast” it. The result was an unmanageable draught of fishes.

How plain were Mary’s words, and how simply were they obeyed, and with what grand results!! Have we learned the lesson? It must have seemed an absurd command to Ezekiel to speak to the very many and very dry bones in the valley, but he did, and the army stood on their feet. It must have seemed a strange message, indeed, the world regards it as “foolishness,” which Paul was commanded to proclaim, but he proclaimed it, and behold the churches that were formed.

How does He speak today? What should be the motive of my obedience? I cannot hear Him audibly or see Him with my eyes today, but His word is left on written record and therein I hear His voice. In it He gives to my soul that inward conviction that it is His special command to me to do His bidding. I am not left to my mental fancies or fostered desires, but in His words I

find that which is capable of almost unlimited adaptation to endless circumstances and conditions, and, when in contact with Him, I cannot fail to learn His bidding. Then, however odd it may seem, however unusual, however apparently against commonsense, I am duty bound to “do it.” The results may confidently be left with Him who gave the word of command.

Not that we should obey because of the results; there should be another spring altogether prompting such compliance with His word, and that is love. “If ye love Me ye will keep My commandments.” We should obey not because we want the benefit but because we love the Benefactor. It is true that Scripture abounds in warnings against disobedience, not only in plain utterance but in historical examples. Through it Adam lost Eden, Moses the land, Saul his throne, the man of God from Judah his life, and David his domestic peace. Many another has followed the sad train.

For us we cannot do better or act more safely than to follow Mary’s advice: “Whatsoever He saith unto you do it.”

“Things Which Are Surely Believed Among Us” (Part 1) (Mar 1963)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 9 No. 3, Mar 1963.

The phrase, “Things which are most surely believed among us” is to be interpreted in no sectarian sense. “Food for the Flock” does not foster sectarianism. The phrase has been extracted from Luke 1:1, and, in using it is a caption for a series of articles touching our Faith, we wish to imply that those responsible for the production of the magazine unreservedly believe all that is contained in “the Scriptures of Truth,” and they write for that large body of Christians who share their like faith. All over the world, and at all times, God has those who, like Paul, say, “I believe God.”

Seeing that our beliefs are based on Holy Scripture, it follows that we should first consider the nature of those Scriptures, in order to satisfy ourselves that our faith is well-founded. Our first paper, therefore, will relate to …

The Authority and Sufficiency of the Holy Scripture

The writer well recalls a conversation he had with a Mohammedan and his positive refusal to admit into the discussion the statements of the Bible. Said he, “You refuse to admit my holy book, and I, therefore, refuse to admit yours.” Yet, apart from the Sacred Writings of Holy Scripture, we can say nothing with assurance touching things which cannot otherwise be verified. We must, therefore, be satisfied as to the reliability of the “Holy Bible.”

The subject is immense, and in such an article as this we can but barely skim the surface. In the first place, we must make it plain that, in claiming that the Scriptures are inspired of God, and are in every way inerrant, we are referring to the original autographs and not to subsequent copies. None of the original documents are extant today: God, for wise purposes, has allowed them to disappear. But there are many copies of these originals available, some of greater antiquity than others, and some more accurate than others. As was almost inevitable, errors crept into the copies, but it is admitted by all who are competent to speak that the number of these is so small relative to the whole that they do not affect in the slightest degree one doctrine of Scripture. We are greatly in the debt of textual critics by whose hard labours we have had restored to us with the barest minimum of “copyists’ errors,” the text as it was originally written.

We must further make it plain that we are not claiming inspiration for the translations of Scripture into various languages. The King James’ Authorized Version is but a revision of former translations, and since it, there have been other revisions. Indeed, in our day we have a spare of translations and alleged translations, many of which are but paraphrases. The writer is not unaware of the necessity of using paraphrases when translating: the two things are almost inseparable where idioms are involved, but for all practical purposes the English reader cannot do better than use the Authorized Version of King James, alongside the Revised Version of 1881.

We firmly believe the Scriptures to be verbally inspired of God. By this is meant that God took up, from time to time, certain persons, and used them in given

circumstances to convey His message to those of their day and in so doing, while He employed their own personality and individuality, He safeguarded them from all error in verbal expression so that they infallibly communicated His mind. He did not dictate the message to them, but in a way that is as mysterious as are all the other works of God, He made these penmen, who were fallible in themselves, convey in infallible words His own message. The Book itself makes claims to this effect. “All Scripture is God-breathed” (1 Tim. 3:16). “Men from God spake as they were borne along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1, 21). “Which things we speak not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth” (1 Cor. 2:13). The penmen were but channels: God was the source, hence we read, “That it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet” (Matt. 1:22). Note the prepositions: “of” denotes source: “by” denotes channel. It was so in Old Testament times when frequently the prophets said: “Thus saith the Lord:” “The word of the Lord came to me,” and such like expressions.

Moreover, the Scriptures are literally inspired, that is the very letters are “sacred letters” (2 Tim. 3.16), not one “jot” (the tiniest Hebrew letter) nor one “tittle” (the tiny curve on one Hebrew letter to distinguish it from another) will pass away. Paul remarks that the word “seed” was in the singular and not the plural, because it pointed to one special Person, Christ (Gal. 3:16).

It is not merely the tenor of Scripture which is inspired, but the very words are, which is evidenced by the fact that the writer to the Hebrews comments on such words as “yet once,” and “new,” and so on (see Heb. 8:13; 12:27).

So utterly were the writers of Scripture under the control of the Holy Spirit that, in some instances, the prophets had to read, search and examine their own writings for they failed to understand their significance (see 1 Peter 1:10). Other authors are expected to understand what they have written, even though their readers may fail to grasp the meaning, but it was not always so with the prophets of old. The reason for this was that they did not write of their own volition. “The prophecy came not at any time by the will of man” (2 Pet. 1:20). Doubtless they felt the burden of their message, grieved at the state of the people, and longed for their recovery, but they were impelled by a power other than their own to inscribe the “words of the Lord.” They knew they were communicating His word.

The men were fallible; their writings were infallible. The men were inspired, their writings are inspired, and they are therefore ‘living oracles’ (Acts 7:38). “The words that I speak unto you they are spirit and they are life” (John 6:63). “The Word of God is living and powerful” (Heb. 4:12). They are living and life-giving in themselves, and therefore when spoken to those who are “dead,” they become a means of imparting life (see Ez. 37:4). They do not become living only when the hearer has life; they are living before ever he lives.

Seeing it is the “Word of God” it partakes of the nature of God: it is faithful, true, authoritative; its foreshadowings “must come to pass.” Nothing must be added to it and nothing taken from it (Deut. 4:2; Prov. 30:6; Rev. 22:18-19).

We cannot here discuss the settlement of the canon of Scripture. Suffice it to say that in the days of the Lord

Jesus “the Law, the Psalms and the Prophets” constituted the sacred volume which He used. It is so today in the Hebrew Bible. As in the New Testament canon, that was settled, not by the decision of a human tribunal, but by the over-ruling providence of God who used the merits of the various writings to win their way into the volume which we now know as the New Testament. There have, of course, been claimants for entry into the Sacred Canon, but we do not stay to discuss the alleged merits and the actual demerits of such writings. At so late a date in human history, we need not raise any question in this direction, though we may add that the interested and curious reader can, should he have the time, browse through the findings of those who have specialized in such a research. We are satisfied that the canon is complete, and that not one book has been wrongly excluded, nor has one book been wrongly admitted. Peter acknowledges Paul’s letters to be “Scripture” (2 Peter 3:16).

The harmony of Scripture is amazing. Suppose one were to collate in one volume the writings of various medical men who lived during the last two millenniums, and resided in different countries and had totally different backgrounds, what appearance of harmony would be there? Yet, men from all walks of life, such as statesmen, shepherds, fishermen, scholars, herdsmen and the like,, living at different eras, in different countries, and all unknown to the others, wrote that which when put together forms one complete, harmonious whole, each part throwing light on the other, and the whole being as a body, each part being mutually interdependent on the other. Does this not demonstrate that one pervading and controlling Spirit was actuating each writer to the same

end? If it be alleged that there are inaccuracies and contradictions, it must be borne in mind that we are not given all the facts, but a divinely selected record of what is relevant, and did we know all, there is no doubt that all such difficulties would be resolved. Besides, as old Matthew Henry used to say, “If there were two blind men, there certainly was one.”

The fulfilment of many prophecies of Scripture is a demonstration of its inspiration. Who, unaided, can forecast with so many specific details, and at so remote a period of time from the accomplishments, events which came to pass in every detail as foreshadowed? This thing is of God and could be of none other. To recount the fulfilment of every prophecy of Scripture thus far up-to date would make a large volume, and space here forbids our entering such a subject. It is well-known that the multiplication of details in a prophecy renders its fulfilment the more unlikely, but not so when God is the Forecaster. The archeologists’ spade has shown how ancient history fulfilled entirely what God had foreannounced. He knows the end from the beginning.

What is called “Science” has attempted to discredit the Bible, but it is such a fickle and changing thing that we are not surprised that the Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture stands unmoved. Any theory may appear to show Scripture to be faulty; but facts are not theories, and as yet no scientific fact has successfully falsified Scripture. If it be objected that the Bible does not speak in scientific terms, and is, therefore, not true to fact, the objector should enquire whether, with all his knowledge, he stills speaks of a rising and setting sun, or is he so pedantic that he speaks differently of these (and other)

matters from all his fellow men? To write in language understood by the unlearned, and in accordance with the appearance of things, is not to be untrue to nature.

But there is more, for the survival of the Scriptures, despite the relentless attempts to destroy it, shows that it has an indestructible vitality. “The Word of the Lord abideth for ever.” Jehoiakim’s penknife may cut it up, and his fire may burn it, but even so God was not thwarted. He had more to say and the last word withal.

It is not merely active opposition that is calculated to destroy a thing, but apathy can be far more effective. How few there are who read and study God’s Word! We speak of “few” among the people of God. Strange as it is, most are apathetic to it. They may read it as a matter of religious duty, but few there be who “delight in the law of the Lord and meditate in it day and night.” It might be supposed that such apathy would reduce the demand for the Scriptures, but notwithstanding, it is still the “best seller.” No inquisitor’s fire can destroy it; no indifference to it can nullify it.

Its effects are amazing: lives have been reformed by reading it; light has entered and life has been imparted by it. Nations have been changed by it, and institutions have arisen which are the practical manifestation of “good works” which the Scriptures call for from those who have first received the “benefit” of God’s grace. Ask yourself, what would life have been like for you had there been no Bible in the land in which you were born and in the home where you were reared?

It is mere gullibility to believe anything one is told without personal investigation to assure one’s self of its truth. Everyone of us should be like the noble Bereans,

and search the Scriptures daily in order to get to know the truth. “To the law and to the testimony:” if in these articles touching “Things most surely believed among us” there should be found anything that is not supported by and gleaned from Holy Scripture, it should be promptly rejected.

It is confidently believed that we shall be found to have stated what is indubitably taught in God’s Word. We shall not be able to explain everything: could we do that, faith would be unnecessary, and the Book itself would be discredited. It is not to be supposed that a finite book would emanate from an Infinite God. No other so-called holy book can compare with the Bible. It stands supreme in solitary grandeur, towering above all else. Of it someone has said:

“The Bible alone, of all books in the world, addresses itself to the whole man; it exercises his memory, strengthens his reason, controls his passions, informs his judgment, regulates his conscience, sanctifies his will, stimulates his practice, quickens his hope, and animates his faith.”

“Things Which Are Surely Believed Among Us” (Part 2) (Apr 1963)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 9 No. 4, Apr 1963.

The phrase, “Things which are most surely believed among us” is to be interpreted in no sectarian sense. “Food for the Flock” does not foster sectarianism. The phrase has been extracted from Luke 1:1, and, in using it as a caption for a series of articles touching our Faith, we wish to imply that those responsible for the production of the magazine unreservedly believe all that is contained in “the Scriptures of Truth,” and they write for that large body of Christians who share their like faith. All over the world, and at all times, God has those who like Paul say, “I believe God.”

Seeing that our beliefs are based on Holy Scripture, it follows that we should first consider the nature of those Scriptures, in order to satisfy ourselves that our faith is well-founded. Our second paper, therefore, will relate to …

The Doctrine of God

It is not to be expected that the readers of “Food for the Flock” would deny the being of God. It is the wicked of whom it is written: “All his thoughts are, There is no God” (Ps. 10:4 RV). “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God” (Ps. 14, 1). But such readers will doubtless from time to time come into contact with these persons, and it is well, therefore, that we should set out our reasons for our belief in God.

“Thou believest that God is one: thou doest well” because this is the unanimous testimony of Scripture. To us there is but “one God.” “There is none else beside Him.” “Of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things, to whom be glory for ever. Amen.” (See James 2:19; 1 Cor. 8:6; Deut. 4:35; Rom. 11:36).

This is a jealous God and will brook no rival. “Thou shalt have no other gods before me” (Ex. 20,3). Idolatry is the vain attempt to oust God from His universe and to put in His stead that which, in fact, is but a lie. Isaiah leaves one in no doubt as to the contempt which God has for idols, and the judgment with which He will visit those who worship them.

One reason why man worships the creature rather than the Creator is because that Creator is invisible, and faith is a prerequisite if He is to be acknowledged. “No man hath seen nor can see” Him. He “dwells in unapproachable light.” “No man hath seen God at any time.” We are not forgetting that God has been manifested in Christ, but God in His essence never can be seen, nor ever will be seen. Even in the New Jerusalem which is to come down from God out of Heaven, the glory of God is contained within the ‘Lamp’ so that the ‘Lamp’ is seen, but the glory is veiled within it (Rev. 21:23 RV). He is the ‘Invisible God’ and consequently man cannot, by searching find Him out. He is unique and to Him alone properly applies the word ‘Only.’ He is supreme, and every principality, power, might and dominion owes its origin to Him. He is ‘far above all.’ Creation is the work of His hands and He transcends it all. God is not part of His creation for it owes its origin to Him. We neither believe in polytheism (many gods) nor do we believe in pantheism (everything

is god). The reader should ponder 1 Timothy 6, vv. 15,16; the true God alone hath immortality essentially, for death cannot touch Him. He is all glorious and to Him alone rightly may honour and eternal might be ascribed.

This is, of course, a matter of faith. “He that cometh to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of them that seek Him out” (Heb. 11:6). How strange it must appear when one bows down and speaks to a Person who is invisible, intangible, and inaudible, and yet he does so in the conviction that that Invisible Person can hear, and see, and speak, and act. The atheist may think he is far more rational in his attitude to such a matter. So, too, may the idolater imagine he has far more sense. Human imagination cannot apprehend such a Being, but there is an inward monitor which refuses to be silenced: its constant witness is that

God Is

and that man is accountable to Him for all his actions. Everything is naked and open to the eyes of Him with whom all have to do (Heb. 4,13). Unless the conscience be utterly seared, or unless the mind be hopelessly and willingly blinded, man has an awareness that God is, and that, go where he may, he cannot escape Him.

“If I ascend up into Heaven, Thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold Thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea: even there shall Thy hand lead me and Thy right hand shall hold me.” Read the whole of Psalm 139, from which this quotation comes, and it will be plain that the attributes of omniscience, omnipresence and omnipotence belong to the true God and to Him alone. It

is the inward conviction of the inescapability of God that causes a man's conscience to trouble him in regard to things he has done which otherwise could cause him no embarassment. Conscience makes him a coward: why? because he knows that God is.

All around us declares the Being of God. "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament sheweth His handiwork" (Ps. 19:1). The "moon and the stars" are the work of His "fingers" (Ps. 8:3). From creation all may learn God's eternal divinity and power (Rom. 1:20). Scientists are constantly telling us of the marvellous and precise accuracy in operation of the system which is all around us: its infinity: its grandeur. It postulates a Master Mind, for it could not have come into existence fortuitously. "In the beginning God created" is what we believe, although there is none who can explain how this was so.

In addition to this, both history and providence demonstrate the Being of God. History is the record of the outworkings of God's foreshadowings. The notion of prophecy may be spurned by the rationalist, but the facts of history when related to those prophecies prove that One is, who Himself is omniscient and to whom the past and future are each alike. He knows the end from the beginning. God lit the prophetic lamp as soon as sin entered the world of man, and from time to time God revealed the future to His servants who wrote those communications. Time has shown them to be so accurate that attempts have been made by adversaries of the truth to post-date some of the prophecies! History and prophecy have fitted each other like key and lock: none but God could have forecast the future with such certainty.

He is omnipresent as Jonah discovered when he essayed to flee from His presence. He cannot be eluded for He is everywhere. “The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth.” “Thou God seest me” said Hagar in her distress. “Thou art with me” may be said by any one of His sheep no matter place or time. His is a ‘real Presence.’

He is omnipotent. Is anything too hard for the Lord? Nothing is too hard for Him (Gen. 18:14; Jer. 32:17). Miracles may be denied by some, but is it to be supposed that the God who established the laws of Creation is unable to go outside of those laws at His will and to set other laws in operation which appear to be contrary to them? Even man makes lifeless objects to fly! We must not ‘limit’ God (Ps.78:41) to the range of our human conceptions. He is ‘the Lord God Almighty.’

He is, moreover, omniscient. The human heart is known by Him though none other knows it, not even the one who possesses it. It is deceitful above all things and incurably wicked: who can know it? Jehovah answers ‘I the Lord.’

These attributes may be a source of comfort to those who seek to please Him, but they should also be a source of anxiety to all who walk contrary to Him. A true apprehension of the infiniteness of the only True God is rarely found in man. Not even a righteous and incomparable man like Job had a right understanding of who God is. Not until God spake did Job mentally see God, and chapters 38 to 41 of the Book that goes under his name are most instructive as to the Greatness of God. A real awareness of the Being and Supremacy of

God humbles a man in the dust, and he becomes as less than a grasshopper in his own eyes.

Three things are specifically stated of God in Scripture: (a) God is spirit: (b) God is light and (c) God is love.

God is Spirit

It is better so to read John 4:24 (RV m). It means that He is invisible, intangible and has neither body nor parts, although anthropomorphic terms are used of Him. He has ears, and eyes, and hands and feet, by which is meant that He can hear, and see, and work and walk. He, therefore, is the Living God —Jehovah, the eternally existent I AM (Exodus 3, and John 8,58). He is immortal.

God is Light

So wrote John (1 John 1:5). It is because of this that the present writer believes that Genesis 1:1 should be detached from the rest of the chapter. He subscribes to the theory of a space between the original creation named in verse 1, and the restoration of that creation after its ruin as recorded in the rest of the chapter. Could God have created anything in a state contrary to what He Himself is? Could He have created a universe in a state of chaos seeing He “is not the author of confusion?” Surely whatever He does must accord with what He is in His own nature! He dwells in unapproachable light (1 Tim. 6:16) and is absolutely holy, just and good. No wonder His law is so spoken of (Rom. 7:12). There is no defilement in Him: He is altogether upright and pure.

God is Love

Here is something more profound. Men doubt it: sometimes the believer, when in adversity or bereavement, is also prone to doubt. We cannot learn this from creation, which because of the fall is red in tooth and claw. Nor can we learn it from history which, as recorded by man, seems to exalt the strong and drive the weakest to the wall.

“God is love I surely know

By my Saviour’s depth of woe.”

Yes, we can only discover the heart of God and learn His love by the cross of Christ. But seeing that we are to devote a paper to that theme we cannot develop it here.

The names by which God reveals Himself in Old Testament times are significant. It would take far too much space to examine them fully: the reader should carefully trace them out in Scripture, such names as El, Elohim, Jehovah, Jehovah-Elohim, Elayon (Most High), El Shaddai, and many others. They all declare something of the infinite fulness which resides in Him.

In conclusion, may we ask how much does this truth weigh with us and affect our ways? There is no need to convince the demons of the being of God: they believe and tremble in consequence. Nor is there any need to convince the believer of the Being of God, but in these days, which are marked by so much shallowness, one wonders whether we are God-conscious to the extent that we ought to be. Surely if our professed belief in the Being of God were real and not nominal, much that is discreditable in speech and conduct would disappear as altogether unsuitable for His holy ear and eye. Enoch, in

his day, walked with this God and had the testimony that he pleased Him. Should we do less?

“Things Which Are Surely Believed Among Us” (Part 3) (May 1963)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 9 No. 5, May 1963.

The phrase, “Things which are most surely believed among us” is to be interpreted in no sectarian sense. “Food for the Flock” does not foster sectarianism. The phrase has been extracted from Luke 1:1, and, in using it as a caption for a series of articles touching our Faith, we wish to imply that those responsible for the production of the magazine unreservedly believe all that is contained in “the Scriptures of Truth,” and they write for that large body of Christians who share their like faith. All over the world, and at all times, God has those who like Paul say, “I believe God.”

Seeing that our beliefs are based on Holy Scripture, it follows that we should first consider the nature of those Scriptures, in order to satisfy ourselves that our faith is well-founded. Our third paper, therefore, will relate to …

The Doctrine of the Trinity

In our second paper we discussed the being of God and observed that there is only One True God. But we are now to consider the doctrine that God is a Unity and a Trinity — One yet Three Persons. This is a great mystery and defies all human explanation. It is a thing that we most surely believe.

Objection has been raised to the use of the word Trinity because it is not found in the Scripture, but that is no good ground for such an objection. Other words such an ‘Incarnation’ are not found there, but the facts for which

they stand are clearly taught in Scripture, and therefore the words, which are comprehensive of so many details, are admissible and free from all valid objection. The word ‘Trinity’ is designed to teach the dual fact of the Unity of God yet the existence of Three Persons in that one Godhead.

Each and every Person is in every respect equal with the other: coequal, co-eternal and co-existent. Someone has written “God is infinite in His being and in all His perfections. But the infinite, by including all, excludes all others. If there were two infinite beings each would necessarily include the other and be included by it, and thus they would be the same, one and identical.” And again, “Each Person possesses the whole essence and is constituted a distinct Person by certain incommunicable properties not common to Him with the Others.”

Attempts have been made to illustrate this mystery and to assist us in its apprehension. Three golden rings each linked with the other have been used to imply the eternal (circle) Deity (gold) of each of the Three Persons, each and all inseparably linked with the other so that they are one. Or again, a cube is all height, all length and all breadth, and all three dimensions are in every respect equal yet there is but one cube. Or again, all time is first future, then present, then past, but it is all TIME. Or again, Patrick used the shamrock leaf to teach this doctrine to the Irish — but one leaf in three parts.

Indeed, man has but to consider his own constitution to see the truth displayed—one person, yet constituted of spirit, soul and body. So too, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit constitute the One God, and each and all possess in perfect fulness every attribute of Diety.

The Scriptures do not say in so many words that there are only Three Persons in the Godhead, but it is, like the fact of God, assumed and nowhere do we read of any other person. Sometimes the order of the names are Father, Son, Holy Spirit, but at other times this is varied. In 1 Peter 1:1 it is Father, Spirit, and Jesus. In Luke 15, where the Trinity is spoken of in parable form it is Christ (the Shepherd), the Light (the Spirit). and the Father. And the reader can trace out for himself all such variations of order. The reason for this is that none has supremacy over the other.

Yet we speak of the first, second and third Persons of the Trinity. These terms are not used in Scripture and are not to be commended. The manner in which these terms came into vogue was that the Father was first spoken of in Scripture: He sent the Son: and the Father and Son sent the Spirit, hence the terms relate to the ‘procession’ of the Persons in the Godhead. Provided that our minds are kept free from any idea of the inferiority of any of the divine Persons, the phrases are passable.

Of course, administratively the Son took the place of subjection when He became incarnate, and will retain for ever this subject place. This seems to be the teaching of 1 Corinthians 15:28 where the words should read — not “the Son also” — but “then also.” When everything has been cleared from all trace of sin, then also, as ever since the time of Incarnation, the Son will remain subject to the Father. This ‘subordination’ of divine Persons within the Godhead is with the view of achieving the accomplishment of God’s eternal counsels, counsels wrought out through Christ and given effect to in individuals by the Spirit. But we must distinguish

between subordination and inferiority: The latter does not exist in the Godhead, the former does. “My Father is greater than I” can only be understood in the sense of His voluntary subjection to the Father in order to do His will.

Some have suggested that herein lies the explanation of the words, touching the day and hour of the second advent, that it is unknown to all, the Son included, save the Father. But whatever the true explanation of this phrase may be, it is certain that each Person in the Godhead has His own peculiar territory of action. “Times and seasons” the Father hath put in His own authority (see Mark 13:32 and Acts 1:7) so that they are not in the Son’s domain. In that sense He does not know. Much as a partnership firm, made up of three partners, each of whom has full knowledge of all the firm’s affairs and equal shares in it, yet each partner has his own special sphere and neither impinges on the other’s functions, so it is in the Godhead. The Father elects: the Son redeems: the Spirit is the seal. It would be wrong to ascribe these actions to other Persons: and so with other functions.

It is in the New Testament that there is a full disclosure of the doctrine of the twin unity, though it clearly was existent in Old Testament times. God is there spoken of as separate from His Spirit: and the Lord Jesus is referred to as an historic Person in the various Theophanies wherein there were Appearances in human form, yet words are used to show that the Person concerned is Himself God.

Each Person is inseparable from the other and none acts independently of the other. As the sunbeam cannot be

separated from the sun, no more can the Son of God be separated from the Father. “I and My Father are One.” “God has sent out the Spirit of His Son into our hearts.” Yet, despite this inseparability and equality, the Son can do nothing of Himself: He does not speak from Himself. Neither does the Spirit. There is no independency in the Godhead. So inseparable are they, that Scripture itself is attributed variously to ‘the LORD’ (Jehovah), or ‘the Lord’ (Adonai), or to the Holy Spirit. The word spoken is the word of all Three. This is so in all the doings of God. Indeed, right at the beginning of Scripture, we have the breach of grammar in that a plural noun has a singular verb: “In the beginning Elohim (p1) created (sing).”

The only One of the Three Persons of the Godhead who has been or yet will be seen is the Son. Just as all future and past time is unseen, and it is only the Present that is seen, so too the Father and the Spirit are eternally invisible. “No man hath seen God at any time: the Only Begotten who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him.”

We are not to imagine that the relationship denoted by the words ‘Son’ and ‘Spirit’ are either unreal, or are non-eternal, not that they only commenced with the Incarnation and the Descent of the Spirit. Christ is the eternal Son of God, the timeless participle, “being in the bosom of the Father,” declaring this. If, indeed, there were an eternal Father, there must have been an eternal Son, for the word ‘Father,’ is meaningless in the absence of a Son. The Son was given by God: He did not become Son when given, but was Son prior to His being given. He is the “Only begotten” in the sense that He is unique: an object of love, precious. The writer knows of no such thing as an ‘eternal begetting,’ but regards Psalm 2:7

and its various uses in the New Testament as all referring to His being begotten in the womb of the Virgin.

The Spirit of God is distinctly called “the eternal Spirit,” a phrase which, it would seem, could not relate to the human spirit of our Lord Jesus when become man. That human spirit was part of the humanity which He took, and just as His body was prepared and had a beginning, so it would seem, too, is this true of His human spirit. But the Holy Spirit is seen active as far back as in Genesis 1:2, and continues so throughout the whole of Old Testament history. We shall consider other details when dealing with the “Doctrine of the Holy Spirit,” so do not pursue this matter further now.

The names used are to be interpreted consistent with the holy subject in hand, and not in accordance with everyday use. “Father” denotes the eternal source: “Son” denotes the equality of nature and relationship: “Spirit” denotes the invisible yet effectual energy of the Godhead. But neither is to be regarded as unreal and impersonal, however difficult it may be for us to understand personality as connected with “Spirit.” In common usage the word ‘son’ implies juniority and temporary inferiority, but these ideas are not to be imported into its use when applied to “the Son of God.” The Sonship of Jesus connotes equality of nature, and loving and mutual affection with the Father. The Spirit is called both the “Spirit of God” and the “Spirit of His Son.” The separation of the human spirit of man from the body involves death, but of God it is said, “Who only hath immortality”: there can be no separation of the Spirit from God. Great is this mystery. Each is a distinct Person, but each is inseparable from the other. So at one

and the same time Jesus is called “Immanuel,” that is God with us, and the Spirit of God abides on Him: three, yet One.

The new Testament abounds in such allusions, but we may merely cite Luke 4:18, where the Lord Jesus quotes Isaiah, 61, “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me.” Note the Persons: The Spirit, the Lord God, and “Me.” And so we might go on. Think also of Matthew 28:20, “Baptising them into the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.” It is not “names,” but “name.” Consider also this: that of the Church it is said that the “Spirit of God dwells” in it; that “Jesus Christ” is in it; and that “God is in” it.

But let this suffice. The doctrine is to be found everywhere in the New Testament in particular, and in the Old as well.

“Things Which Are Surely Believed Among Us” (Part 4) (June 1963)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 9 No. 6, June 1963.

The phrase, “Things which are most surely believed among us” is to be interpreted in no sectarian sense. “Food for the Flock” does not foster sectarianism. The phrase has been extracted from Luke 1:1, and, in using it as a caption for a series of articles touching our Faith, we wish to imply that those responsible for the production of the magazine unreservedly believe all that is contained in “the Scriptures of Truth,” and they write for that large body of Christians who share their like faith. All over the world, and at all times, God has those who like Paul say, “I believe God.”

Seeing that our beliefs are based on Holy Scripture, it follows that we should first consider the nature of those Scriptures, in order to satisfy ourselves that our faith is well-founded. Our fourth paper, therefore, will relate to …

The Deity of Christ

In our previous papers we have observed that the Lord Jesus Christ is One Person in the Godhead, and therefore His deity is assumed. But seeing that this is denied by many, even by those who make a profession of Christianity, it is important that we should devote a chapter to it. “Some said, He is a good man; others said, Nay, but He deceiveth the people” (John 7:12). Which of these is right? The reader may be surprised when we reply, neither. Most certainly He did not deceive the people: He was ‘the truth.’ Nor was He merely a ‘good

man,' for, if He were that and no more, we can only reply that no good man would ever make the claims for himself which He made. Unless those claims were true, then, far from being a good man, He did deceive some people, if not all the people. If one admits that He was a good man then one must also admit that all He said about Himself was true.

The writer was once approached by a Mohammedan who said that if it could be proved that Jesus was the Son of God, he would there and then bow down and worship Him. Unhappily, nothing that was said appeared to convince him, but it will, perhaps, be helpful to the reader if we recite something of what was then said.

Of the Messiah it was foreshadowed that He would be "the branch of the Lord," as well as "the fruit of the earth"—and Jesus claimed to be that Messiah. He was the "Son given" as well as the "child born." "His goings forth had been from of old," from eternity. It is not only in these and like statements that the Deity and eternal being of the Lord Jesus is prophetically affirmed, but it is implied in such verses as Psalm 110:1. "The Lord said unto My Lord." Touching this the Lord Jesus asked the Pharisees "What think ye of Christ? whose son is He?" To which they replied "The Son of David," and the Lord retorted, "If David then called Him Lord, how is He his son?" The Deity of Jesus was wrapped up in that Davidic Psalm.

For those who unquestioningly believe in the Deity of the Lord Jesus, the Old Testament abounds in confirmatory statements, but those who deny this do not regard such statements as proving the case. Space forbids that we should enumerate them here, but the

reader would be well repaid by searching for himself and seeing that this is so. In the grey mists of unfulfilled prophecy it is little wonder that even the godly were perplexed: the belief in two Servants of the Lord, one humbled and rejected and another glorified and powerful was shared by them, and the confusion was only cleared up when “Jesus of Nazareth” had been raised from the dead, and He Himself gave the true explanation that the prophecies were all fulfilled or to be fulfilled in the One Person, and that suffering must precede glory.

It is in the New Testament that we are given indisputable evidence and categorical affirmations of the Deity of the Lord Jesus. We will list a few of the passages: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” It is little wonder that Satan has stirred up man to deny this, and to do so by alleging that this verse has not been correctly translated. Some have translated the anarthrous word “Theos” by “a God,” whilst others have given it the sense of “the God.” The true force of the phrase is that all that characterizes God characterized the Word, and though there was distinction of personality there was always and also equality of being. One of the latest translations of the New Testament gives, “What God was, the Word was,”

Again, “The Only Begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him.” He stands ‘unique’ as the only begotten. The word ‘begotten’ does not connote commencement of being as we shall see later. The verb ‘is’ is timeless—He always was and for ever unceasingly will be in the bosom of the Father. The words ‘Father’ and ‘Son’ do not imply seniority or

juniority as they do among men, but equality of nature and all that pertains thereto. No one less than God could declare what God is. These opening words of John's Gospel are fundamental and their importance cannot be over-rated. When all things began to be, the Word was then: He was a distinct Person in the Godhead wherein all relationships were harmonious and equal. "The same was in the beginning with God," which is to say that this position of equality in the Godhead and distinctness of personality were not originated at some point of time but were, like the Person, eternal.

These are statements made by the inspired writer, John. But he records also the claims made by the Lord Himself. The reader should closely examine the whole of John 5, noting carefully what led up to and flowed from the remark of Jesus, "My Father worketh hitherto and I work." The Jews rightly deduced from this that He "made Himself equal with God." Had their deduction been false or over-stated our Lord would have been prompt to have corrected them and not, for a moment, to have allowed them to indulge such wrong conclusions. But on the contrary, He virtually said "And that is exactly what I am." I am equal in operation: in life-giving: in honour: in utterance; and in self-existence. Lest it be supposed that He is making claims for Himself without confirmatory witnesses, He cites as witnesses John, His own works, the Father Himself, the Scriptures, and, in particular, Moses.

On another occasion He said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was I am." Observe carefully the preamble to this statement. It was not a rash remark, but was a solemnly averred claim to eternal being, equality with Jehovah, whose name was declared to be

“I am that I am.” He broke the man-made rules of grammar in order to make this fact plain.

Again, “I and My Father are one” — one substance, indivisible. It is not sufficient to say that they are one in purpose, or power, or anything else, for the statement admits of no limitation whatsoever — they are One in everything. Here by six words the Lord Jesus makes the clearest possible claim to Deity and equality: the words are unambiguous. They are not of doubtful interpretation.

When addressing His Father in prayer, He speaks of “the glory which I had with Thee before the world was.” Is this anything less than an awareness of Deity? Could a mere created being have so spoken? As a matter of fact, the very recorder of these words tells us earlier in his Gospel, “All things were made by Him and without Him was not one thing made that was made.” If, therefore, ‘all things’ had their origin by Him, it follows that He must have been prior to all and excluded from all.

The Gospel of John is well-known to contain many records of the usage by the Lord Jesus of the words “I am.” This is not the place to write of them, save to call attention to the effect that it had upon those who came to arrest Him in the Garden of Gethemane: “They went backward and fell to the ground.” This was creature facing the Creator, this was creature defying the Creator. What could be expected but powerlessness on their part, though in marvellous grace He gave Himself up to them.

John records seven sign miracles, and he tells us his purpose in making this selection was that his readers “might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.”

Miracles, of course, per se, do not prove Deity, for Moses and Elijah and others wrought them, both before and during the life of the Lord Jesus on earth. But this selection was unusual, for they were wrought by personal and not delegated authority, and showed His power over nature, disease, sin and death. One evangelist records how that prior to working a miracle of healing, He forgave the sins of the palsied man. “Who can forgive sins but God only?” They were right, but He was God and this they did not know.

Yet they did know this much, that “He made Himself the Son of God,” which they regarded as blasphemy. By the law of Leviticus 24:16 they thought He should have been put to death. But was their charge right? He did not make Himself the Son of God; He was that. To “make one’s self” something is self-exaltation, and this was farther from Him than are the poles: quite the contrary was the case. Yet it was because of this they crucified Him. His resurrection from the dead, however, proved that His claim was a true one; “He was declared to be the Son of God with power” by it. God vindicated Him.

This is one of the things “most surely believed among us.” We know how important it is, not merely in relation to His own glory, (and that cannot be over-rated) but for our own welfare, for “If ye believe not that I Am, ye shall die in your sins.” Our eternal security depends upon our faith in the Son of God.

Everywhere one turns in the New Testament this truth is either stated or implied. It, and the humanity of Christ, are as warp and woof, and neither can be separated from the other without doing irreparable damage to the

whole. We must be content merely to cite a few remarks from the epistles touching this matter.

Paul speaks of the Lord Jesus as “being originally in the form of God.” The insertion of the word “originally” is merely to bring out the sense of what Paul wrote: it must not be assumed that at some later time He ceased to be in the form of God. He did not substitute the form of God for the form of a servant, but rather conjoined the later form to the former. He did not cease to be God when He became man no more than, when risen and glorified, did He cease to be man. “In Him dwelleth (now that He is in Heaven) all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.” The word used is that which denotes Godhead in its fulness, and not mere divinity, which is a word of like appearance used by Paul elsewhere. Godhead has to do with essence: divinity with quality.

Other words are used of Him. “He is the image of the invisible God” which means He exactly represents, fully and perfectly, all that God in His unseeable essence, is. He is “the effulgence of His glory and the express image of His substance.” As sunbeam is inseparable from the sun, and as the impression on the wax corresponds exactly and precisely to the seal which made it, so, eternally, there is exact correspondence with, perfect representation of, and full manifestation of all that the Father is. The timeless participle forbids us limiting this to the days of His flesh.

It is unthinkable that the things stated regarding the Lord Jesus could be true, were He not God. How could One fully reveal all that God is, were He not His equal? “He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father,” He said. How could one not God be before all things, and be the

instrument whereby they all came into existence? How could one not truly God be “head over all things” which He is said now to be?

When on earth, “God was in Christ.” He was “Immanuel” (God with us). His being here is accounted for by the fact that the Father “sent” the Son: that the Son “came”: that He was “manifested,” all of which and like verbs imply a prior being, a thing true of none other of the human race.

James calls the Lord Jesus “the glory” an allusion, perhaps, to the Shekinah glory dwelling between the cherubim. The passage is variously translated, but this would seem to be its sense.

This paper could be almost indefinitely extended for no matter where we turn in our New Testament, we find the doctrine of the Deity of Christ either affirmed or assumed. A Saviour who if not verily God is, as another has said, a bridge broken at one end. No one but God manifest in flesh could be utterly sinless, both in nature and deed, for it must not be overlooked that it was because of His Deity that He could not sin, as well as that He was not able to sin.

If He be not God, we ought not to worship Him, yet Christians throughout all ages have gladly done so: they find it impossible not to do so. They are aware that He is the destined Judge of all, and for ever bless Him that, at the cost of His life on earth, He redeemed us from the curse that sin had brought upon us. “Unto Him that loveth us, and hath loosed us from our sins in His own blood, be glory and dominion forever and ever, Amen.”

“Things Which Are Surely Believed Among Us” (Part 5) (July 1963)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 9 No. 7, July 1963.

The phrase, “Things which are most surely believed among us” is to be interpreted in no sectarian sense. “Food for the Flock” does not foster sectarianism. The phrase has been extracted from Luke 1:1, and, in using it as a caption for a series of articles touching our Faith, we wish to imply that those responsible for the production of the magazine unreservedly believe all that is contained in “the Scriptures of Truth,” and they write for that large body of Christians who share their like faith. All over the world, and at all times, God has those who like Paul say, “I believe God.”

Seeing that our beliefs are based on Holy Scripture, it follows that we should first consider the nature of those Scriptures, in order to satisfy ourselves that our faith is well-founded. Our fifth paper, therefore, will relate to…

The Incarnation

We have before emphasized in this series that we are dealing with things which we believe. We admit freely that we cannot explain all things which we believe, for we are not rationalists. Someone has written of the irrationalism of infidelity: he was right, for there are a limitless number of things which all men everywhere believe though they can explain but a very small fraction of them.

So in the matter of the incarnation. We believe that God made the first man without his having any human

parents. In the nature of the case it could not have been otherwise. Then we believe that the first woman was made from the male, but without the female parent. Normally, the human race is produced from male and female conjointly, but why should it be thought a thing incredible if God departed from His normal method and caused our Lord Jesus to become incarnate without human father but with human mother?

The accounts are recorded in decorum and becoming brevity, but are full and adequate for all honest people. The re-actions in the mind of Joseph who was espoused to Mary are recorded by Matthew. The reactions in the heart of Mary are recorded by Luke. So that there are given the two sides of the matter.

The Lord Jesus was real man: conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary, born as all others of the human race are born, and grew in mind and stature as all others. His human nature was real, but was begotten of God. He had human spirit, human soul and human body. He did not appear to be a man, as some heretics held. He was real man!

No reasonable doubt can be entertained by the honest mind that the father of the Lord Jesus was not Joseph. Not merely does his intention of ‘putting her away’ tell against it, but it is plainly affirmed that the conception occurred “before they came together” and that he “knew her not” till the child was born.

Mary was a virgin at the time of conception. Much endeavour has been expended in order to try to show that the word employed by Isaiah means a young married woman, but if a young married woman had a son, it would have been only natural and would not, and

could not have been, a supernatural sign. The translators into Greek of the Old Testament (their work being known as LXX) had no doubt of the meaning, and their word - parthenos - is used and quoted by Matthew.

We may be quite sure that Joseph, who first doubted the faithfulness of Mary, would not have been easily satisfied, but seeing that he was contented to go on with the betrothal contract and to marry her thus ensuring the child being born in wedlock, it is evident that he had had divine assurance that God was moving in the affairs of men to implement His long-standing promises. The one to be born was “The Child born, and the Son given.”

If anyone doubts the innocence of Joseph in the matter, he must satisfy himself as to why Matthew and Luke are each prepared to commit themselves to writing on the subject. Is it to be supposed (apart altogether from the divine inspiration of Scripture) that these two men would willingly subscribe to what was known to be an immoral conception? What motive could each of them have had to have whitewashed Joseph and Mary?

Luke records the birth of two at about the same time, that of John Baptist and that of the Lord Jesus. In the one case the conception took place naturally but much later than is normal. In the other case the conception took place too early as men consider, and that unnaturally. Zechariah, the father of John, sings after the child is born: but Mary sings her Magnificat before the child is born. In the case of John it is said, “Thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son,” but no such statement is made to Mary, or to Joseph.

It is appropriate that Luke, a doctor, records Mary’s side of the story. He informs us that “he has gone over the

whole course of these events in detail" (Luke 1:3, NEB) having satisfied himself of the accuracy of what he recounts.

This sheds an enormous amount of light upon the Old Testament Scriptures. The promise of Genesis 3:15 takes on a new aspect. 'The seed of the woman' shows that God Himself intended to depart from the normal procedure as set out in Genesis 2:24, and would bring into the race through the faulty vessel (ibid 3:1) Him who would undo the damage of sin. It illumines Psalm 69:8, "I am become a stranger unto my brethren, and an alien unto my mother's children." Even when the Lord Jesus was here, His brethren did not believe on Him, but observe also the precise accuracy of the inspired Psalm. The Psalmist speaks of "my mother's children:" not "my parents' children." When the Lord spake of "My Father," His reference was to God and not to Joseph. He never so spake of Joseph, though he was regarded by the people as his legal father.

An endeavour has been made to discredit the account of the Virgin Birth of the Lord Jesus because, it is said, no other of the New Testament writers speaks of it. But this is reaching a wrong conclusion, it being based on a wrong premise. Others do speak of it, though they do not name the parties involved.

It is not to be expected that any allusion would be found in Mark's Gospel. Who is interested in the parentage of a servant? All one wants to be assured of is competency in the person who is to serve. But is it not remarkable that Mark 3:31-35, speaks of "His mother," "Thy mother," "My mother," but not a word about "My father?"

And what shall we say of John's Gospel? He tells us "the Word became flesh" (John 1:14). He was not made it but voluntarily became it. He does not go into details, but there must have been a time when this change took place, when the eternal Son of God became what He was not before. It may be that the taunt of the people, recorded by John, "We be not born of fornication" was a rebuff to Him, implying that He was. One, however, wonders whether at such a long time after the birth, and having regard to the secrecy of the thirty years spent at Nazareth, the facts were known. Man quickly forgets, and it is not to be supposed that Mary would blazon the matter abroad. But apart from this, one must explain how John could write of One who gave so many evidences of being a real man — who hungered, thirsted, was weary, wept, and so on. His humanity must be accounted for somehow.

Nor did Paul ignore the matter,. He writes that "God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under law." The verb he uses is not the same as the Lord used of John Baptist: John was the greatest "born" of women: but Paul says the Lord Jesus "became" of a woman. His verb denotes a voluntary alteration of position and condition. It is not to be expected that the other New Testament writers would go into the details which the Spirit of God had caused Matthew and Luke to recount. There would be no need for such duplication. But there is abundant evidence that they believed and taught the true, full and real humanity of Jesus, the Son of God.

For example, Paul writes "God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh." His was not sinful flesh, but He came in the likeness of it. He did not come in the likeness of unfallen man, whatever that may have been,

but He came into conditions similar to those of fallen man. Paul, moreover, speaks of the Lord Jesus as “of the seed of David according to the flesh,” and again, “Of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came.” Whatever else the phrase means, it is an acknowledgment of His true humanity.

He “became in the likeness of men, and being found in fashion as a man He humbled Himself.” All that pertained to unfallen humanity (for sin is not a necessary part of human nature; it is an intruder into it) He was. “In all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren.” “He was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.” He did not come into angelic state, but was “made a little lower thah angels.” He could experience what they could not: he hungered, thirsted, and such like. He came into our sphere and took humanity without taking sin. In common with all others of the human race, we share blood and flesh, but He of His own volition, and pursuant to the undertaking He had given the Father, willingly took part in the same. The word “likewise” in Hebrews 2:14 (See Greek) implies that there was a radical difference between Him and all others of the human race: theirs was fallen humanity: His was sinless humanity. But He did not take it in the condition which Adam had it prior to the fall: He took it in the condition — sin apart — in which He found it after the fall.

If sinners were to be delivered from the consequences of the fall, God Himself must come into the human race. This He did in the Person of His Son, Christ Jesus. He was the “last Adam”: the “second man.” His body was specially prepared by God, and was therefore sinless and incorruptible. In death He saw no corruption. But

since “without shedding of blood there is no remission,” and since it is “impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins,” it follows that if sins are to be removed at all God Himself must come into the human race, take blood and flesh, and deal with the problem from outside of fallen man. This, blessed be His name, he has done. Sin and death relate to humanity and if they are to be abolished it can only be done in that sphere.

He did not share man’s sin though He took human nature,. He did no sin: in Him was no sin: He knew no sin. He was holy, harmless, undefiled and though He mingled with sinners and attracted them in love to Himself, there was an unbridgable gulf between them in their sins and Himself in His holiness. Notwithstanding the fact that Mary was a sinner, that which was born of her was “holy.” In a manner that is beyond human explanation the Lord Jesus took human nature from His mother, but He did not take human sin: there was no taint of it in Him. Do not let us pry into the manner in which this could be. God is angered when anyone looks into the ark. The secret things belong unto the Lord, and we should be content with those that are revealed.

By His incarnation He took a place of subordination to the Father. “My Father is greater than I” by which He did not imply essential inequality but administrative subjection. Much as a partnership business in which all the partners are equal, but some take subordinate places to the others, but each and all work together for the common good and achievements of common purposes.

“Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in flesh is of God.” This is the acid test. In a former paper we said, “A Saviour who is not verily God is, as another has said, a bridge broken at one end.” So we would say here: “A Saviour who is not verily man is, as another has said, a bridge broken at the other end.” But in the Person of Jesus, the Son of God, Job has his longing answered, and we too. He is the great “Daysman” who can by reason of His Deity touch the throne of God, and by reason of His humanity touch the poor sinner.

Things Which are Surely Believed Among Us (Part 6) (Aug 1963)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 9 No. 8, Aug 1963.

The phrase, “Things which are most surely believed among us” is to be interpreted in no sectarian sense. “Food for the Flock” does not foster sectarianism. The phrase has been extracted from Luke 1:1, and, in using it as a caption for a series of articles touching our Faith, we wish to imply that those responsible for the production of the magazine unreservedly believe all that is contained in “the Scriptures of Truth,” and they write for that large body of Christians who share their like faith. All over the world, and at all times, God has those who like Paul say, “I believe God.”

Seeing that our beliefs are based on Holy Scripture, it follows that we should first consider the nature of those Scriptures, in order to satisfy ourselves that our faith is well-founded. Our Sixth paper, therefore, will relate to …

The Person of Christ

In our two previous papers we have considered the Deity of Christ, and His humanity, each separately. But this separation can only be in thought, for though the two natures may be distinguished, they are indivisibly united in the Person of Christ. All the chief early Christian heresies related to the Person of Christ, either denying the reality of His humanity or denying the fact of His Deity. We cannot be too thankful to God for those stalwarts who earnestly contended for the faith and withstood those errorists.

As the veil of the tabernacle of old was made of blue, purple, scarlet, fine twined linen, and all was interwoven with threads of gold, wrought with requisite wisdom by God, so Christ embodies in Himself all that these colours denote. His Deity and humanity are so closely knit together that denial of the one, or even error as to it, must involve error as to the other: neither can remain unaffected. Neither one nor other of the two natures was merely apparent and not real, but He embodied in Himself two whole and perfect natures, Deity with all its attributes and humanity with all that sinlessly marked it. Not one nature was accommodated to the other: each in fulness co-existed in the One Person.

It is utterly impossible for anyone to explain how this can be. The Lord Jesus is at one and the same time both God and Man. He knew all men and so possessed omniscience. He was everywhere and so possessed omnipresence: He was the Son of Man who had descended to earth from Heaven, yet was also “in Heaven.” He could do all things as His sign miracles attest, and so He possessed omnipotence for nothing is impossible with God. Yet He asked questions and averred also that He did not know the day nor the hour of His coming. This seems to deny His omniscience. An angel came and strengthened Him and Simon the Cyrenian carried His cross. This seems to deny His omnipotence. If He were on the mountain praying, He was not with His disciples distressed in rowing on the lake. This seems to deny His omnipresence. All this seems to tell against the truth of the affirmation of His Deity. But whilst the Father, who is Deity alone, may be known by the revelation given by the Son, yet the Son, who is both Deity and humanity, remains eternally

inscrutable, for it is beyond human capacity to harmonize these. As with other antinomies of Scripture, the one seems to exclude the other, much as divine sovereignty seems to exclude human responsibility. But faith bows and believes where we cannot explain.

He is both the Child born and the Son given. He is both Jesus, the Man, and the Son of God. He is both Jesus and Immanuel—God with us. He is both root and offspring of David, and as "offspring" He came after David. He is both Lord and son of David: He is both "the young Child" and "My Son." The Spirit of God has caused these titles to be put together in this manner in order to stress the fact of the co-existence of the two natures in the One Person. John Baptist said that Jesus came "after him," though He was "before him."

We must guard against saying that the Lord Jesus did certain things 'as man' and that He did other things "as God." It was One who was both God and Man that did these things—one side of His being cannot be divided from the other. He never so acted. Principles of human logic do not apply in divine things, and this is specially so in the case of the Person of Christ. It was human logic that led to the erroneous doctrine of "the mother of God."

Neither is the Lord Jesus what has been called "the God-man" for that merely describes an imaginary kind of man: it makes the word 'God' an adjective. In speaking of our blessed Lord it is safer by far to adhere strictly to what is written in the Scriptures of Truth.

Nor is it only in the matter of His names that there is this remarkable conjunction of things, but we may trace the same in His actions. From Jerusalem He goes to

Nazareth and is subject to His “parents,” yet at the same time He spoke of His “Father’s house,” and He certainly was not referring to Joseph. The word ‘parents’ relates to His humanity: the word ‘Father’ to His Deity.

He sits on the well, weary, and asks for water for He was thirsty, His disciples having gone away to buy meat to satisfy the promptings of human hunger. The Lord knew what it was both to be hungry and thirsty, yet at that very time He does what none other could do: He told the woman of Samaria all that ever she did. He unveiled her whole life which was known to Him as fully — and more so — than to herself.

He is asleep with His head on the pillow at the stern of the boat, yet, He awakes and displays that He has complete authority over the winds and the waves, so that they obey Him. Can mere man do this?

He hungered in the wilderness when the devil challenged His Deity and Sonship, yet, when the ordeal of the temptation was over, angels came and ministered to Him (and it is the inferior who serves the Superior). Moreover, at that time the demons confessed Him to be the Son of God.

Like the centurion, but in an infinitely greater way, He was both “a Man under authority” having willingly taken the subject place, as also He was One who spake and worked “with authority.”

On the cross He said “I thirst” yet of His own volition, and having authority from the Father to do so, He bowed His head and dismissed His Spirit. He lay down His life. Clearly the One who hung on the central cross was different by far from the two who were crucified with

Him, not only in character but in Being altogether. He possessed powers that they — nor any other — had not.

On almost every page of the New Testament this may be traced either in history or in doctrine. “The mother of Jesus” is present at Cana of Galilee where the Lord turns the water into wine. He speaks of His ‘flesh’ and ‘blood’ in such a way as to indicate that the one that “eateth Me, even he shall live by Me.” Such things can only be explained by the acknowledgement of the indissoluble union and co-existence of the two natures.

It is the same in the Epistles. The phrase, “The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” implies the two natures: “God” has in view His humanity, “Father” His Deity. He is “our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ.” Here ‘Jesus’ denotes the Man, but “God” denotes His Deity. The two phrases “according to the flesh” and “according to the spirit” used of Him teach the same thing. He ever was and unceasingly is “in the form of God” but, at His incarnation, conjoined to it “the form of a bondservant, and was found in fashion as a man.” Here the two natures are clearly indicated. Again, “of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever more. Amen.” No wonder the enemy has sought to tamper with the translation of this verse. It is too plain and indubitable for their liking. Again, “But to us… there is one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things and we by Him.” This duality of natures is existent even now: “In Him dwelleth — at the present time — all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.” This is not mere “divinity” of which Paul speaks in Romans 1:20, but “Deity”: Godhead.

If this inseparability of the two natures, which began at His incarnation and is now eternally true of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, be not admitted, then it is impossible to hold in truth either one of those natures. If He were merely man, He could not make the claims and promises, nor could He have done the things He did. If He were only God, He could not, on the other hand, have suffered the things which He did, or have experienced those common things of life which all mankind know. To deny that the Lord Jesus is at one and the same time both God and Man is to deny altogether the Unique Person of whom the evangelists wrote and concerning whom the Epistles teach.

It is precisely for this cause that John wrote his Gospel, that his readers might believe that the Man known as Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

It is this that Peter acknowledged at Caesarea Philippi, saying to the Man before him “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” All four evangelists agree in this matter. The Man Jesus that put forth His hand and caught Peter, saving him from sinking, is the One of whom they said at that time, “Of a truth, Thou art the Son of God.” Wherever the hand of the Lord Jesus was in action, there was God’s perfect Man at work, but at work in such a way that it could not ‘be denied that He was God also, for what that hand did were the works of God.

This truth dawns upon the soul but gradually, but where there is a heart ready to believe whatsoever God reveals, all becomes plain though the facts cannot be explained. The blind man of John 9 first knew his Benefactor to be “a Man that is called Jesus,” but when

he was informed that that Man was the “Son of God” he said, “Lord I believe.” And “he worshipped Him.”

It is the Son of Man who tells John, “I am He that liveth and became dead.” The force is that He was the ever and essentially living One. He who entered the human race is also the eternally living One —there never was a time when He was not. This is the same One who at the tomb of Lazarus “weeps,” yet with authority and power says “Lazarus come forth.” And so we might go on. The Being of our Lord is as His coat, “without seam, woven from the top throughout.” It must not be rent. He is the true “Daysman” and, being both God and Man, He can lay His hand on each and bring man to God and God to man. He manifested “God in the flesh,” and this could only be by union of the two natures.

Things Which are Surely Believed Among Us (Part 7) (Sept 1963)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 9 No. 9, Sept 1963.

The phrase, “Things which are most surely believed among us” is to be interpreted in no sectarian sense. “Food for the Flock” does not foster sectarianism. The phrase has been extracted from Luke 1:1, and, in using it as a caution for a series of articles touching our Faith, we wish to imply that those responsible for the production of the magazine unreservedly believe all that is contained in “the Scriptures of Truth,” and they write for that large body of Christians who share their like faith. All over the world, and at all times, God has those who like Paul say, “I believe God.”

Seeing that our beliefs are based on Holy Scripture, it follows that we should first consider the nature of those Scriptures, in order to satisfy ourselves that our faith is well-founded. Our Seventh paper, therefore, will relate to …

The Death Of Christ

It is, indeed, remarkable that we should have to write touching the death of the One concerning whom we have had to say so many marvellous things. It is to be feared that our long acquaintance with the fact that ‘Christ died’ has caused us to lose the wonder of it — that One who was both God and Man should even die at all. But so it is.

The Lord Jesus was the only One ever born into this world with the specific intention that He should die. It

was ‘on account of the suffering of death’ that ‘He became lower than angels.’ He came into the world ‘to give His life a ransom for many’ and thereby ‘to save sinners.’ If they were to be saved He must die, for one or the other must suffer for sin. While Bethlehem was an essential step to Calvary, Calvary was an unavoidable necessity if man was to be redeemed. ‘The Son of Man must be lifted up.’

Why was this so? Could no other way have been adopted? We may be sure that, having regard to the Lord’s prayer in Gethsemane, had there been another way open it would have been taken. But there was no other way. Only by His death could the divine plan of the ages be brought into effect. Because of this the Lord Jesus was ‘the Lamb foreknown indeed before the foundation of the world,’ and in due time He died pursuant to ‘the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.’ Those things which God before had showed by the mouth of all His prophets, that Christ should suffer’ were fulfilled by His death. He was the One whom God ‘purposed to be a mercyseat, through faith, in His blood.’ The death of the Lord Jesus was therefore, no surprise to God: it was not unexpected: it was the keystone of the arch of His eternal purpose.

There are four aspects of His death which we should consider:

First, it was an attack of Satan. Satan who headed the ‘powers of darkness’ entered into Judas for the purpose, and Judas was at the head of the band that came to arrest the Lord. It was an attempt to defeat the purpose of God and to overthrow truth. It was then that the ‘seed of the woman’ was assaulted by Satan, but at that same

time Satan himself received the fatal blow from the Triumphant Saviour. He ‘destroyed (put out of action) him that hath the power of death, that is the devil.’

Secondly, it was a cruel murder by wicked men. Judas originated the plot and the Jewish religious leaders gladly carried it into effect. Because of their restricted powers they had to seek Gentile help and, therefore, it was ‘by lawless hands’ they took Him and crucified and slew Him. In the four Gospels there is interwoven the record of the growing hatred of these religious leaders of the Jewish people who were incited by envy. They, in turn, stirred up the people and, together, they all became His ‘betrayers and murderers.’

It is true they did not know Him, and, in putting Him to death, they acted in ignorance. But having had their eyes opened later, their hearts were still unchanged and their murderous intent was as relentless as ever, as is evident when they put Stephen to death. He told them that they had now become His murderers. The charge of manslaughter was amended to that of murder.

Because of this the Jewish people, concerning whom God has future designs of grace, have suffered so much ever since, and their greatest of all tribulations is yet to come upon them. They accepted the responsibility for the death of Jesus. “His blood be on us and on our children,” they cried. They also passed the effects on to their posterity and God is taking them at their word,.

Thirdly, it was an act of divine judgment. “Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd, against the Man that is My fellow: smite the shepherd.” Or, as rendered in the New Testament, “I will smite the Shepherd.” It was Jehovah Himself who caused to meet upon the head of the Holy

Sufferer the iniquity and punishment of us all. As the fire from Heaven consumed the sin offering and reduced it to ashes, so the fire of divine judgment fell on Him at Calvary, not for His own sins, but because He then took the place of the guilty but believing sinner, and not only bore his sins but He took away the root evil of 'sin' itself. God made Him to be sin for us.

Fourthly, yet withal it was a willing self-sacrifice. Time and again we read "He gave Himself." "I lay down My life for the sheep." He said. "I lay it down of Myself." It was His own act, not that He killed Himself, but that He complied with His undertaking to the Father given prior to His coming to earth.

These papers have necessarily to be brief, but the reader is well-advised to ponder these four facets of the death of Christ and, by perusing the Scriptures, to amplify what we have here written in so few words.

There is abundant evidence to support the fact that the Lord Jesus died voluntarily. He refused to be persuaded not to go to Jerusalem, but of His own choice He set His face as a flint and went thither, though He knew what awaited Him. The inability of the posse that entered the garden of Gethsemane to arrest Him caused them to fall backward. He gave His back to the smiters and His cheeks to them that plucked off the hair. He hid not His face from shame and spitting. He could have returned to Heaven and none could have forbidden Him but, prophetically, He says, "I turned not away backward."

The manner of His death was altogether unusual. He cried with a loud voice TETELESTAI — 'it is finished' and then bowed His head and dismissed His spirit. He was throughout all the willing fulfiller of the Father's

counsels. Well might Pilate marvel that He was dead already when it was reported to him that Joseph of Arimathea petitioned the body. His legs were not broken for that was unnecessary. Though, naturally speaking, He could have resisted the sufferings the longest, yet He died the quickest of all three. How is this to be accounted for? In none other way than that He laid down His own life.

This does not in the slightest reduce the wickedness of the crime of man in causing Him to die violently. Peter thrust home the charge again and again: “Ye took Him, and slew Him and hanged Him on a tree.” It is not for us to pry into the question of how these two things can be reconciled: it is sufficient to know they are both true. He laid down His life for no man had, up to that time, taken it from Him. But man put Him to death when His hour was come.

Yet there was another side of the matter. He died sacrificially and His blood was shed to atone for sin. “Without the shedding of blood” there could be “no remission,” yet it “is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin.” No marvel then that the New Testament lays great stress upon the value of the “precious blood” of Christ, for by that means, What the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, condemned sin in the flesh and so put an end to it.

The whole theology of the New Testament is based upon this fact. All God’s ways in olden times had the cross in view, and He passed over the sins of people who lived then because He knew Christ was to die. As it were, He

forgave them on credit. All His ways in these present times since the cross are because of it. Every spiritual blessing that the believer has is founded on His blood. The Lord's Supper is to him a reminder of the shedding of His blood for the remission of sins.

A bloodless Gospel is no Gospel at all. The true Gospel declares that "the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin." We praise Him that "He has washed us from our sins in His own blood."

The death of Christ is the indisputable proof of the love of God. "God commendeth His love toward us," says Paul, and he emphasizes that it was when we were without strength, when we were yet sinners, indeed when we were enemies, in due time Christ died for us. What greater proof of love could we have? Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. But He laid down His life for His enemies. And what enemies! "Father forgive them," He pleaded, "for they know not what they are doing." This He said when they were actually crucifying Him. Had He a worse enemy than Saul of Tarsus? But it is he who is glad to own, "He loved me, and gave Himself up for me."

It was not by chance that He was crucified. The curse of a broken law was on the entirety of the human race. Everyone deserved to finish his days on a gallow, for, "Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree," and "Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things that are written in the law to do them." Yet "He became a curse for us" and He hanged on a tree. He did not die for His own sins: He had none. But He died "for the ungodly." He died "for us". He died, says Paul. "for me." We can, as did the American who wrote his name on the

little cross in the Gettysberg cemetery where his Civil War substitute lay buried, write our name by faith on the Cross, underneath the name of our Substitute, and add as did that American the words, “He died for me.”

Intrinsically there was efficacy in the death of Christ to meet the needs of all. He gave Himself a ransom “for all.” “He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the whole world.” We dare not consider the efficacy of the death of Christ quantitatively, we must always think of it qualitatively: it was not so much punishment for so many sins, for the Person who died was of infinite worth, and His death was, therefore, of infinite merit. There is no such thing recognized in Scripture as a limited atonement.

This may seem to be contradicted by the fact that two prepositions are used — the one huper which has to do with essential efficacy — and the other anti which has to do with applied benefits. But the former relates to propitiation, the providing God with a righteous basis on which to deal with the sinner in mercy, while the latter has to do with substitution and relates to those who, by faith, have drawn upon the limitless provision that has been made: a provision which is still open to all who will.

What has the death of Christ achieved? Space forbids but the merest indication. The reader should pursue the hints given by diligent study.

It has opened the way into the holiest of all, for the veil of the temple was rent from top to bottom by an invisible hand when He died. The old order of earthly ritualistic religion was abolished and a spiritual order was brought in. By His death and resurrection the power of Satan

and sin and death were all broken. Many bodies of the saints arose after His resurrection. He spoiled principalities and powers by His death, His resurrection making it manifest. He put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. In Him we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins.

His death brought to an end sin and self, and the law. He fulfilled all the enactments of the law of God without the slightest breach, and then died under its curse in substitution for the actual infringers. Both the enactments and the penalties having been paid, the whole document can be taken out of the way as indeed it was, it was nailed to His cross. He paid the price — not indeed to the devil, but to Justice — and we have been redeemed from the curse of the law for 'He became a curse for us.'

In ordinary affairs it would be utterly immoral to allow an innocent person to suffer the capital penalty for the guilty, though it has been known that for a good man someone has dared to die. But there was no immorality in the cross. He who died was One of whom it is said, "The Word was God." God's Son was not 'given up for us all' contrary to His own wish. We are here in the sphere of unfathomable mystery and our words should be few. "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself" by the cross. The offended Law-giver took the place of the guilty law-breaker and bore his punishment. All the Godhead was involved in this: "By the eternal Spirit He offered Himself without spot to God."

And what more shall we say? The theme is inexhaustible for it finds its place in the whole volume of Scripture. As someone has written: "The death of Christ is as a scarlet

thread in the whole canon of Scripture. The historical books of the Old Testament prove its necessity: the Levitical foreshadow its meaning: the Psalms give its experiences: the prophets foretell its sufferings: the Gospels record its fulfilment: the Acts proclaim its blessings: the Epistles explain its doctrine: the Revelation exhibits its fruits."

"For Christ hath once suffered, for sins, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God." His death was final— "once for all:" it was penal, "for sins": it was vicarious " the just for the unjust": it was purposive — "To bring us to God."

Things Which are Surely Believed Among Us (Part 8) (Oct 1963)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 9 No. 10, Oct 1963.

The phrase, “Things which are most surely believed among us” is to be interpreted in no sectarian sense. “Food for the Flock” does not foster sectarianism. The phrase has been extracted from Luke 1:1, and, in using it as a caption for a series of articles touching our Faith, we wish to imply that those responsible for the production of the magazine unreservedly believe all that is contained in “the Scriptures of Truth,” and they write for that large body of Christians who share their like faith. All over the world, and at all times, God has those who like Paul say, “I believe God.”

Seeing that our beliefs are based on Holy Scripture, it follows that we should first consider the nature of those Scriptures, in order to satisfy ourselves that our faith is well-founded. Our eighth paper, therefore, will relate to …

The Resurrection Of Christ

Christianity is different from all other religions because it was founded by a Person who, though once dead, is now alive. All other religions were originated by leaders who are now dead. Confucius is dead: so, too, is Mohammet; so, too, is the Virgin Mary (though she did not found any religion). We say nothing as to the gods of Hinduism or Buddhism; they never had life. But Christ is alive.

Just as God of old marked out His chosen man by the dead stick which came alive and bore bud, blossom and fruit, whilst all the other eleven sticks remained lifeless (Num. 17:8) so Christ is the only One acknowledged by God, for He alone is alive.

But are we sure that He is alive? We have not actually seen Him. Any alleged inward experience will not suffice genuine investigators.

“You ask me how I know He lives,

He lives within my heart.”

will not satisfy them. They will ask for convincing evidence. What proof have we that He lives today?

This question was, fortunately, raised in the early Church and it afforded Paul the opportunity to deal with it. That it should have been Paul, and no one else, that did this is remarkable, since he once used every endeavour to stamp out Christianity and all who adhered to it. He was, of course, by no means the first to believe that Christ was alive, nor was he the first to preach it. Peter and others had done so much earlier, and they had suffered considerably at the hands of those who refused to believe their testimony. Yet these honest witnesses clearly had no personal axe to grind: they could do none other. “We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard,” they said (Acts 4:20).

Paul goes into the whole matter in his letter to the Corinthians and enumerates the eye-witnesses. (1 Cor. 15:10). He has overwhelming proof which should satisfy the most insistent mind. In the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established: so spake the

law. But how many could be produced to establish the fact that Christ rose?

Paul well knew that the world had not seen the Risen Christ and that, therefore, the witness came only from those who had accepted His claims and had allied themselves with His cause. He knew that men would think them biased: could they be otherwise? But the evidence was too strong to admit of any genuine doubt. He had been seen of Peter, then of the apostolate, then of more than five hundred brethren at once. The latter were, at that time, for the most part, still living so that reference could then be made to them in order to verify the matter, He repeats it, saying He was seen of James, then of all the apostles, and then Paul adds his own personal testimony. He was not depending solely on a second-hand report, for he himself had personally seen Him.

Had the Risen Christ been seen only by one, that testimony could not be admitted in law for according to Moses there must at least be two or three witnesses (Deut. 17:6). One only could have so easily been mistaken, though honest in his belief. Had He been seen merely of the apostolate, it might have been contended that there was collusion between them to spread a report which they all knew to be false. But it would not have been possible to have secured such an agreement to deceive by over five hundred persons.

It may not be possible for us, in the absence of full information, to harmonize the various appearings of the Risen Christ, but none of them contradicts or is incongruous with the other, and, together, they form an irresistible proof of the reality of the fact. He was seen

in the morning (John 21:4), in the afternoon (Luke 24: 13), in the evening (Luke 24:19). Appeal was made to their senses: He ate with them (Acts 10:41), He spake to them, He was touched by them (John 20:19). His scars were recognized (John 20:27), His voice was identified (John 20:16. There could be no reasonable doubt whatsoever that He was alive.

The rumour that was spread abroad that His disciples had stolen the body by night (Matt. 28:11-18), whilst the guard was asleep, was so obviously untrue that it is difficult to explain its reception by anything else than wilful unbelief. How did they know who it was that took the body if they were asleep? How was it they dared to admit they were asleep whilst on duty? Was it likely that the seal could be broken without waking the sleeping guard? Could the stone have been rolled away so quietly as not to wake them? Why did they not make the disciples produce the body? That should not have been difficult, though, for the disciples to dispose of the dead body was no easy task, Many a murderer has found this out to his great embarrassment. Again, why did they not indict them for theft? But no such attempts were made, for whoever would believe that an unarmed band of eleven men, many of whom were plain fishermen and none of whom was a trained soldier would have dared such a thing? There is another thing: the disciples did not so much as expect Him to rise again, (Luke 24:15), so that the idea of their attempting to do such a thing is altogether out of the question. In fact, when the women reported the resurrection to them they regarded their talk as “idle tales.”

Moreover, is it to be supposed that such men as the apostles would publicly preach His resurrection to the

vast crowd met together in Jerusalem at Pentecost had the fact not been true? Could one imagine that Peter, who so recently had denied Him before a mere girl, would dare to preach this were he not sure of his facts? Would the other ten have been willing to stand by him as co-witnesses had it not been true? They all stood their ground and this angered particularly the Sadducees who denied resurrection altogether, yet “with great power they gave witness” to this fact. The resurrection of Christ out from among the dead upset all their long-standing theories that such a thing was impossible. As one body the apostles were a more than sufficient witness to the fact.

Paul insists that the resurrection of Christ is basic to Christianity. If Christ is not raised then they have been misrepresenting God, saying He did what, in fact, He did not. Moreover, those who had believed He was alive perished when they died if their belief had not been well-founded. There could be no forgiveness if Christ is not raised, and all are “still in their sins” no matter whether they believed He was alive or not. Paul’s whole argument on the supposition that Christ is not raised is of tremendous force. The whole fabric of Christianity falls to the ground like a pack of cards.

There is no neutral territory here: either He is alive and believers are rightly confident of eternal bliss, or else He is not and they have all been deluded, and the preachers, in particular, are of all men the most to be pitied. But Paul has no doubts about it and he continues his discussion of the matter: Christ is raised from the dead.

But did He actually die? Is it possible it was not an actual case of resurrection from the dead but merely a restoration after a most harrowing experience? That could not be, for John bears witness to having seen the “blood and water” which flowed from His side when pierced with the sword on the cross. Were it merely a case of restoration back to life, would it be likely that He would have been able to go about within three days in the full vigour of perfect health? Would He not rather have required to be nursed back to health with many weeks of tender care?

But let us interrogate others. Ask Peter and John, and they will tell you that they entered the tomb: they found it empty, though the grave clothes were there, arranged just as they were wound round the body and head. No thief had been there, for that they certainly would have taken the linen and spices we may be sure (John 20:5). Ask Mary, and she will tell you He spoke to her by name and all her grief at once vanished like the mist before the sun, (John 20:16). Ask Thomas — he was sceptical enough — and he will tell you how he saw the scars and what he said and did in consequence, (John 20:28). Ask the Apostles what happened when they were in the barred upper room, fearing what the Jews might now do to them who had followed their (supposed) dead Leader, (John 20:19). Ask the Lord’s natural brethren what it was that made them believe on Him, though they did not before He died, (Acts 1:14-25). Ask yourself, how is it that all the world over, ever since the Lord ascended, believers have kept the ‘Lord’s Supper’ till He return? He could not return were He not alive. Ask yourself, how do you account for the very existence of Christianity if it did not originate consequent upon His proclaimed

resurrection? Again, how is it that time is divided into BC and AD? How is it that Easter Sunday is observed throughout Christendom? It must have had a cause.

If Christ is not raised all the doctrines of Christianity which have been built thereon are untrue. We were told He was raised again for our justification, but if He is not raised then we are guilty and utterly hopeless, (Rom. 4:25). We have been led to suppose that friends and relatives who have died in the faith were sure of eternal glory: “If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them that sleep through Jesus will God bring with Him” (1 Thess. 4:9). On this account we have sought to place our lives under His Lordship, and that by no means without benefit. Have we been mistaken?

When risen, the Lord Jesus displayed powers that were not so often used before His death. The significant phrase is used “He gave Him to become manifest” (Acts 10:40) to those met in the upper room without using the door. He left in like manner. We have no account of where He lived during the forty days, nor with what He was clothed, for His grave-clothes were left in the tomb. He could either be tangible or intangible: visible or invisible. He could eat and drink or subsist without doing either. He had a ‘body of glory’ with which He ascended to Heaven (Phil. 3:2). He was the ‘first fruit’ of them that sleep: they too will be given a similar body.

Of course in this, as in all else, He stands alone and unique. His body saw no corruption: those of the saints do. His body was a special preparation by God and, therefore, was incorruptible. But incorruptibility will characterize the bodies of the glorified believers. By His resurrection He has brought to light both life and

incorruptibility, which two things are announced in the Gospel (2 Tim. 1:10). He died in dishonour and was “crucified in weakness” (2 Cor. 13: 4). But He was raised in glory and in power, So it is to be with His people. His resurrection body is a prototype of theirs.

Forty days after His resurrection He ascended into Heaven. Eleven accredited witnesses saw Him go and three have seen Him subsequently. First, Stephen saw Him standing at the right hand of God, (Acts 7:56). Secondly, Paul says he saw “Jesus Christ who appeared to him in the way” (Acts 26:16). Thirdly, John saw the Son of Man — the Lamb —in the midst of the throne in Heaven, (Rev. 5:6). In the mouth of these three witnesses every word is established.

The four Gospels record the fact and circumstances of the resurrection. There is no cunning collusion in the records as is plain from their disconformity: we did not say their contradiction. They each record that it was a woman who made the first announcement, a forceful reminder of the fact that it was a woman who first brought sin into the world. The Book of the Acts recounts the preaching of it by both Peter and Paul in particular and others in general. All the Epistles are written on the assumption that Christ is risen: they recount it, assume it, and explain its significance and effects. And the Apocalypse forecasts its glorious issues both as to Heaven and earth.

The subjective experience of the Christian that Christ is in him “the hope of glory” may suffice for himself alone, He has no misgivings that Christ is alive: he knows it within himself. But others will ask for external evidence

and the foregoing should suffice for all whose minds are not closed.

Things Which Are Most Surely Believed Among Us (Part 9) (Nov 1963)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 9 No. 11, Nov 1963.

The phrase, “Things which are most surely believed among us” is to be interpreted in no sectarian sense. “Food for the Flock” does not foster sectarianism. The phrase has been extracted from Luke 1:1, and, in using it as a caption for a series of articles touching our Faith, we wish to imply that those responsible for the production of the magazine unreservedly believe all that is contained in “the Scriptures of Truth,” and they write for that large body of Christians who share their like faith. All over the world, and at all times, God has those who like Paul say, “I believe God.”

Seeing that our beliefs are based on Holy Scripture, it follows that we should first consider the nature of those Scriptures, in order to satisfy ourselves that our faith is well-founded. Our ninth paper, therefore, will relate to …

The Work of Christ in Heaven

Having considered the resurrection of Christ, it follows naturally that we should now think of His present work.

The resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus not only vindicated Him, but also compensated Him for what He endured. Man gave to Him the lowest place of dishonour on earth, for no more shameful end to man’s life could be than that which is ended on a gallows (Gal. 3:13). But brutal men were prevented from disposing of

His body “with the wicked”: He was “with the rich in His death” by the providential intervention of God, (Isa. 53:9). They would, however, have had it otherwise had they been able. He was despised and rejected of man, yet He was the Man that God “delighted to honour” (Esther 6:11). Is it any marvel, then, that God should have given to Him the highest place of honour in Heaven. He is seated at His right hand there. This is the point of Peter’s remark to the Sanhedrin, “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted at His right hand,” (Acts 5:31). The lowest position of dishonour was “the tree” — the dead tree stump on which the Lord was suspended by wicked hands: the highest point of honour is at the right hand of God in Heaven.

Not only so. “Consider and see if there be any sorrow like unto My sorrow” (Lam. 1:12), are words, not only applicable to Jerusalem, but also, in full measure, to the Lord Jesus. His soul was “exceeding sorrowful” (Matt. 26:38). He exceeded all others in it. But God has now “anointed” Him “with the oil of gladness above His fellows” (Heb. 1:9). He has a commensurate exceeding joy. All the darkness and the sorrow and the shame of the cross are over for ever.

Although He came as the King of the Jews and despite the fact that that claim was valid, yet He was given a cross outside the city of Jerusalem instead of a throne inside. Notwithstanding that, God has received Him into Heaven and He has “sat down with His Father in His throne,” (Rev. 3:21), pending the time when He will return to earth and occupy His own throne. He is, there, “from henceforth expecting till His enemies be made His footstool” (Heb. 10:13).

One of the offices He now fills is that of

Prince

The word prince connotes dignity, supremacy, authorship, leadership; it indicates priority of importance of rank. He who, in order to achieve the counsels of the Godhead, willingly took the subordinate place, nevertheless stands next in rank to the Father, administratively, though equal essentially.

This title is used four times of the Lord. Peter calls Him the “Prince of life”, (Acts 3:15), “a Prince and Saviour” (Acts 5:31), and the writer to the Hebrews calls Him “the Captain of our salvation” (Heb, 2:10), and “the Author of Faith” (Heb. 12:2). The same Greek word is used in each case.

As ‘Prince of life’ He is contrasted with Barabbas who was a murderer — he took life, the Lord alone could give it. As ‘Prince and Saviour’ He stands in relation to Christ — rejecting Israel, and His exaltation is in view of their later repentance and forgiveness. For repent they will, and their Confessional is prophetically given in Isaiah 53. Their national salvation can be in none other: for ‘there is no other name given under Heaven among men whereby they, as a nation, “can ever be saved” (Acts 4:12). No doubt these words can be extended in their application to all mankind, and in relation to salvation from sin and judgment, but in stressing this we must not lose sight of its other bearing. It is because of this possible extension that He is called “the Captain of our Salvation” — He originated it: made it righteously possible. He, too, is the ‘Author of Faith’ standing at the head of the column of the innumerable number of those who have lived, or are living lives of faith.

He is “exalted at God’s right hand” (Acts 5:31). Thus the position has been reversed. When here, in distress, God was at His right hand to help (Psa. 109:31). But now, having done all the will of God, costing Him as it did the pangs of Calvary and all that was involved therein, He has been received up into Heaven and has taken His seat at the right hand of God. This is the position of special honour and power,

And not only so: but He is sitting there, for His work on earth is done. This is stressed both in the Old Testament and in the New.

High Priest

The notion of a sitting high priest was altogether foreign to Israel. No seat was provided either in the tabernacle or temple, for, because of the inefficacy of animal sacrifices, the work of the priests was never done. But Christ, by His one offering, has perfected for ever them that are sanctified (Heb. 10:14) and, in consequence, there is no more offering for sin (Heb. 10:18). Our Great High Priest may, therefore, sit down. It would take far too much space to discuss fully the high-priestly work of Christ, but there are features about it which stand in striking contrast to the Aaronic priesthood of old. This is a royal priesthood, for the Lord Jesus is both King as well as Priest (Heb. 7:14). It is a perpetual Priesthood, for He lives by the power of an endless life. He ‘ever liveth” and, therefore the transmission (Heb. 7:24), of His priesthood to a successor does not come into question. In every way it is superior to the Levitical priesthood. The writer to the Hebrews argues this effectively by referring to the payment of tithes by

Abram to Melchizedek (Heb. 7:5), Levi not yet being born.

Another one of His offices is that of Saviour

Saviour

This is a title used of the Lord Jesus, not only when here on earth, but now that He is in Heaven. He is the "Saviour of the body" (Eph. 5:23). He is the Saviour whom we are expecting from Heaven (Phil. 3:20), to change our bodies of humiliation into the likeness of His body of glory. We are looking for the "appearing of the great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ" (Tit. 2:13).

This closely impinges on His Priesthood, for "He is able to save to the uttermost … because He ever liveth" (Heb. 7:25). The reader can readily develop this theme for himself.

Yet another office that He occupies is that of Forerunner (Heb. 6:20).

Forerunner

He is the first Man to have entered Heaven in a glorified body, and He is, therefore, the Guarantor that others will follow Him. As the First-fruit, so the harvest. As the Fore-runner so the followers. Departed saints are certainly "with Christ" now, but they lack their glorified bodies: they are in a disembodied state awaiting, like ourselves, the full realization of "the hope set before us" (Heb. 6:18). They cannot "without us" be made perfect (Heb. 11:40).

And again, He is the Head.

Head

He is Head of the body, the Church, as well as “Head over all things” (Eph. 1:22). From Him come all nourishment, and direction. We will not dwell on the subject here, because when we consider the doctrine of the Church this will be involved. His present position in Heaven as “Head” is however, only the beginning, for it is the purpose of God to “head up in Him all things, both which are in Heaven and which are on earth” (Eph. 1:10). This He will do in the “dispensation of the fullness of times” and Christ will stand supreme over all things.

Advocate

In the person of Christ in Heaven “we have an Advocate with the Father, even Jesus Christ, the righteous” (1 John 2:2). The Advocacy of Christ is to be distinguished from His Priesthood. Priesthood depends on His likeness to us, Advocacy upon His unlikeness. Priesthood has to do with our relationship with God: Advocacy, of that with the Father. Priesthood has to do both with sins and weaknesses: Advocacy with sins alone. The Advocacy of Christ, as also His priesthood, is based upon His “propitiatory offering” which furnishes the Righteous Advocate with a righteous ground on which to plead with a Righteous Father. It is unthinkable that such a plea could fail.

Bishop

This word Bishop is used by Peter, and it means “Overseer” (1 Pet. 2:25). He links with it the word “Shepherd” and the phrase may be rendered “the Shepherd, that is Bishop, of your souls,” He was once on earth the Good Shepherd who gave His life for the

sheep, (John 10:11), now in Heaven He is the Great Shepherd who is caring for the sheep, (Heb. 13:20), and soon He will appear as the Chief Shepherd, rewarding the under-shepherds (1 Pet. 5:4).

It would take us too long to dilate on the duties of a shepherd and the marks of a good shepherd. The reader should do this for himself.

These then are some of the offices that our Lord and Saviour fills now He is in Heaven. He is not indifferent to the well-being of those for whom He died and who are on their way ‘to glory’ (Heb. 2:10). He has, as a good Shepherd, left them in “the hand of a Keeper” — the Holy Spirit (1 Sam. 17:20), — and in addition, is Himself continually acting on their behalf in Heaven.

It is not to be supposed that He is in Heaven interminably, for time and again we are reminded that He is there “until” the time comes for the accomplishment of the purpose of God concerning Him. “The heavens must receive Him until the times of the restitution of all things” (Acts 3:21). He is to sit at God’s right hand “until” all His enemies have been placed beneath His feet, (Psa. 110:1). He has “sat down on the right hand of God, from henceforth expecting” till this subjugation of His foes takes place (Heb. 10:13).

We should not think of this as a bodily posture, but more as a position of honour which He occupies.

Just as a monarch occupies the throne but bodily may be in any place, so, too, Christ occupies the highest position of heavenly honour, which He will never vacate.

God’s King in Reserve

Joash was hidden away in the temple, during the wicked reign of Athaliah, (2 Kings 11), so too, the Lord Jesus — earth’s rightful King — is hidden away in Heaven until the time arrives when God will bring again into the world His Firstborn. It may appear that everything has gone awry on earth, and that the promises of God seem unlikely of fulfilment, but God has His own appointed time for bringing His Son into those rights of which He was deprived when He was crucified. God, then, temporarily, broke off His dealings with Israel, and through them with the world, and brought in the reign of grace, the duration of which he has not disclosed. While grace is reigning on earth, Christ is enthroned in Heaven. And while grace is reigning all national barriers are ignored; it flows out to whosoever will accept it. Thus God has over-ruled the wickedness of man to the accomplishment of the designs of His mercy, but of that we must speak in a separate chapter.

Things Which Are Most Surely Believed Among Us (Part 10) (Dec 1963)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 9 No. 12, Dec 1963.

The phrase, “Things which are most surely believed among us” is to be interpreted in no sectarian sense. “Food for the Flock” does not foster sectarianism. The phrase has been extracted from Luke 1:1, and, in using it as a caption for a series of articles touching our Faith, we wish to imply that those responsible for the production of the magazine unreservedly believe all that is contained in “the Scriptures of Truth,” and they write for that large body of Christians who share their like faith. All over the world, and at all times, God has those who like Paul say, “I believe God.”

Seeing that our beliefs are based on Holy Scripture, it follows that we should first consider the nature of those Scriptures, in order to satisfy ourselves that our faith is well-founded. Our tenth paper, therefore, will relate to…

The Holy Spirit

During the absence of Christ in Heaven, He has not left “His own” to tread life’s journey alone on earth. He, the Good Shepherd, has left them in the hand of a Keeper” (1 Sam 17:20). Indeed, His very absence in Heaven and the presence on earth with them of the Holy Spirit is a positive gain (John 16:7). Although the apostles had supposed that the departure of their Lord would entail them in irreparable loss, the contrary was the case. “It is expedient (profitable) for you that I go

away," said the Lord, for had He not done so the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, could not have come. The glorification of the Lord Jesus was essential in order that the Holy Spirit should come and reside among His people on earth. (John 7:39).

The stupendous vital changes that were effected by the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ are not sufficiently apprehended. The presence at God's right hand of a glorified sinless Man was something altogether new in the economy of God. It is no wonder, therefore, that there should be on earth something else that was new, and that is the permanent residence here of the Holy Spirit one person of the Godhead, in His people on earth. This is the peculiar characteristic of the present era; it is the age of the Spirit.

Never before Pentecost had there been such a thing, as the Spirit of God taking up His permanent abode on earth. He had, from time to time, visited earth and clothing persons for a particular purpose, enabled them to do exploits (Jud. 6:34), but when accomplished He left such persons. It was not until the Lord Jesus was here that the Spirit could find a resting place among men. He had been as Noah's dove that had to return because it found no resting place for the sole of its foot (Gen. 8:8). Christ was the only One on whom He could abide, (John 1:33), and it was this that identified Him as God's Messiah to John Baptist. But, even so, the Spirit of God had not then taken up His permanent residence on earth amongst the redeemed of men. The Spirit could not be given until Jesus was glorified. But once Christ had died and risen again. He could breath on His own people and say, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost," not that they then and there received Him, but the way was clear for their so

doing, everything having been now done that was requisite for the purpose, and every obstacle having been removed.

We must not imagine the Holy Spirit is a mere influence. It is true the word “Spirit” in Greek is neuter, but verbs are used of Him such as leading, teaching, bringing to remembrance, and the like, which show beyond doubt that He is a distinct Person in the Godhead and attributes are ascribed to Him showing His absolute equality in the Godhead. There can be no escape from His presence: He is omnipresent (Psa. 39:7). Moreover He searches all things: He is omniscient (1 Cor. 2:10). And His works, right from the beginning of Scripture and throughout, make clear His omnipotence (Gen. 1:2). We must distinguish between His personality and His influence. That He exerts a mighty influence is true, but that He is much more than that cannot be effectively gainsaid.

The Lord Jesus was conceived in the virgin’s womb by the Spirit (Matt. 1:20). He was throughout His life led by the Spirit: (Matt 4:1). He was full of the Holy Ghost. (Luke 4:1). It was by the same Spirit He wrought His miracles (Matt 12:28), and also offered Himself without spot to God (Heb. 9:14), as well as by the same Spirit He gave commandment to His apostles after His resurrection (Acts 1:2). In all this He becomes the exemplary and perfect Man who has left His people an example as to how they should walk.

John Baptist said of Him that He would “baptise in the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 3:11), and the Lord Jesus said the same (Acts 1:5). This was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost when the Spirit of God changed His

headquarters from Heaven and took up residence among His people on earth. Hitherto He had wrought from Heaven on men on earth: now-a-days He works on earth, through His people, for He dwells here. Later on He will resume His former mode of operation.

The Baptism of the Holy Spirit is an epoch making event in the ways of God. It was historic, for the day and year may be named. It was unique, for the like had never before occured nor has it since. It was final, for it admitted of no repetition. The Church was born on that day, and it only now needed for it to develop and grow. It was, therefore, a corporate thing. The baptism of the Spirit is not an individual experience now-a-days, to be sought after by some under the name of “a second blessing.” Of this the Scriptures know nothing. When Adam sinned, all his posterity was adversely affected and, when each was born, he came into the consequences of that one act. So, too, when Christ baptised the believers in the Spirit, it was a thing which affected all His posterity, and when each one was born again, he came into the consequences of that one act. The correct reading of 1 Corinthians 12:13, in the R.V., should be noted. Paul is there speaking of the entire Church of which, of course, he formed part. He uses the pronoun “we” though when he alludes to the Corinthian local church (V. 27) of which he was not a resident member, he uses the pronoun “ye.” The baptism of the Spirit, then, is not a blessing to be sought, but a position which may and ought to be enjoyed.

We have said that the absence of the Lord Jesus in Heaven and the presence of the Spirit on earth is a gain for the believer, and by no means a loss.

When the Lord was here on earth there were occasions when He and the apostles were not together, and they were in distress because of His absence. No such circumstance like that can recur now, for the Spirit is not only with us but is in us (John 14:17). More than that, the Lord was with them for but three years and a little more at most: but the Spirit is with us forever (John 14:16). Then the Lord could not disclose all His mind for His people were not able to bear it. But now the Spirit brings all things to our remembrance (John 14: 26). He takes of the things of Christ and shows them to us (John 16:14), and He reveals to us things to come (John 16:13). All is disclosed, nothing is held back. Our apprehension of it may be small, but the disclosure is complete.

The Spirit is called “Another Comforter” (John 14:16). The word “Another” means another and equal. There is a Greek word which means another and different, but it is not that word which is used in this connection. The Spirit is equal with the Son, though sent both by the Father and Son. As we have seen before in our studies, voluntarily assumed subordination in the Godhead does not involve personal inequality. He is called “the Comforter,” a word which means advocate or patron, and implies one who stands at our side to maintain our cause whatsoever it may be. Thus the believer has an Advocate in Heaven, the Lord Jesus (1 John 2:1), and an Advocate on earth, the Holy Spirit. The Spirit has been called “the Vicar of Christ” because He acts for Christ on earth, whilst Christ acts for the believer in Heaven.

It is not possible within the compass of these papers to deal exhaustively with such a vast subject but, in brief, we may say: The work of the Spirit stands in relation (a)

to Christ (b) to the believer (c) to the world and (d) to the devil. Let us consider these.

(a) As to Christ: “He shall glorify Me” (John 16:14). This is the prime work of the Spirit on earth. He does not speak from Himself (John 16:13), but He is here to pursue the interests of Christ. It may, therefore, be presumed that all that is done by His people which tends to this end is wrought by the Spirit: all that is otherwise does not emanate from Him. It is His business to “witness to Christ”: His is an inaudible, invisible, irresistible presence securing the honour of Him who had been so grossly put to shame by men.

(b) To the believer: He is not only with him, but He indwells him (John 14:17). This is the hall-mark of every true Christian. “If any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of His” (Rom. 8:9). Every believer is instantly, the moment he believes, sealed with that Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13). The Spirit becomes his Teacher (John 14:25), Monitor, Guide (John 16:13), Indweller (John 14:17), Earnest (Eph. 1:14), Activator (Eph. 3:16), and much else. The reader should examine all the noted passages if the benefit of this study is to be obtained. Where the Spirit is not given His rightful place, defeat must inevitably follow, but where the Spirit is owned and His prompting obeyed, there is bound to issue a life of love, joy, peace. Nor is it only for this life that the Spirit works, but on account of the fact that the believer’s body has been a temple of the Holy Ghost (Rom. 8:11), the resurrection of that body into conformity with the body of the glory of Christ his Saviour is ensured also.

A lifeless machine can work, but it is only where life exists that fruit can be found (Gal. 5:19). So, too, the

works of the flesh are enumerated by Paul and by their side he places the “fruit of the Spirit.” Healthy introspection at times does not harm, and it would be well for us to examine our lives to ascertain whether or not this “cluster” of fruit is to be found in us (Gal. 5:22).

The reader should consult every reference to the Spirit of God in the epistles, a thing which it is not possible for us to do in this brief paper; it will reveal to him the tremendous scope of His activities in the individual believer, in the Church as a whole, in the local church in particular, and in every sundry earthly relationship.

(c) To the world: The Spirit’s presence on earth brings a demonstration to the world of three things (John 16:8). Whether individual sinners are themselves convicted of this is another matter. But the Spirit’s presence on earth is because of Christ’s presence in Heaven. And Christ’s presence in Heaven denotes man’s wickedness on earth in that they cast Him out by a violent death. Thus the Spirit’s presence demonstrates man’s sin because they did not believe on Christ but cast Him out. It demonstrates also Christ’s righteousness because, while the world adjudicated Him in the wrong, the Father asserted His righteousness and received Him in Heaven. And Christ’s presence in Heaven denotes the devil’s conquest, in that he could neither keep Him in the tomb nor could he keep Him bound to earth. Up from the grave He arose; up through the skies He went! So that the Spirit’s presence here denotes man’s sin, Christ’s righteousness, and Satan’s defeat.

(d) To the devil. We have anticipated this in our last paragraph so that we need not repeat it. As the Lord Jesus when on earth went about healing all that were

oppressed of the devil, so, too, now the Spirit of God is likewise pursuing the eternal counsels of the Godhead in also liberating those who are held in the bondage of Satan.

But we may add more. The Universal Church is a habitation of God by the Spirit (Eph. 2:22). The local church likewise is the place where the Spirit of God is dwelling (1 Cor. 3:16). How often we are apt to forget this, the invisibility of the Spirit tending to make us unmindful of the awesome reality. The context in which Paul reminds the Corinthians of this should be pondered. Had they but borne it in mind much of the disorder occurrent among them would not have flourished. And one is led to believe that, were the Spirit's presence a greater reality to our own souls, much of the levity and hypocrisy of which our own hearts are aware would be cast out, and greater purity and greater reverence would mark our gatherings.

In such a study as this the believer must bear in mind the two aspects of it: that relating to doctrine and position, the other relating to condition and behaviour. Categorical affirmations are made that the Spirit has been given, received, indwells, abides, baptises, and so on. On the other hand, the believer is exhorted to "be filled" with the Spirit, (Eph. 5:18), to be "led" by Him (Gal. 5:18), to "sow the Spirit" (Gal. 6:8), to "walk in the Spirit" (Gal. 5:16), to "keep step in the Spirit" (Gal. 5:25) and the like. Due weight must be given to each set of statements. These two things God hath joined together and where the practical obedience is lacking, in all likelihood the positional reality is also lacking.

Things Which Are Surely Believed Among Us (Part 11) (Jan 1964)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 10 No. 1, Jan 1964.

The phrase, “Things which are most surely believed among us” is to be interpreted in no sectarian sense. “Food for the Flock” does not foster sectarianism. The phrase has been extracted from Luke 1:1, and, in using it as a caption for a series of articles touching our Faith, we wish to imply that those responsible for the production of the magazine unreservedly believe all that is contained in “the Scriptures of Truth,” and they write for that large body of Christians who share their like faith. All over the world, and at all times, God has those who like Paul say, “I believe God.”

Seeing that our beliefs are based on Holy Scripture, it follows that we should first consider the nature of those Scriptures, in order to satisfy ourselves that our faith is well-founded. Our eleventh paper, therefore, will relate to…

The Hope

Though we speak of the “things touching the Hope of the Church most surely believed among us,” yet there is much discord. This is regret-able and ought not to be. It largely springs from having pre-conceived notions, a refusal to accept further light, and a failure to be both consitent and logical in interpreting the Scriptures. If we ignore the context of a passage, we shall surely go astray in deciding its meaning.

We cannot in an article of this character go into all the details of the coming of our Lord Jesus, but one thing is crystal clear, and that is, that He will return bodily and visibly. “This same Jesus which is taken up from you into Heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into Heaven” (Acts 1:11). That was said to believing Jews. That was said before the Church, the body of Christ, was formed. That was said as to His coming back to earth, for He went from earth. No time was indicated, but it was in perfect accord with Zechariah 14:4. “His feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives which is before Jerusalem on the east.”

The Old Testament Scriptures abound with, and some New Testament Scriptures refer to details as to conditions on earth when this will take place. In fact, one has only to read the first three verses of Zechariah 14 to have an idea of those conditions. It is a complete mistake to spiritualize what the Spirit of God has stated so plainly and lucidly. One may glean practical lessons, as we should from all God’s past and future dealings with men, but in determining the meaning of any passage regard must be had to what is said, not to what we apply it to ourselves or to others.

There are two sets of truths in the New Testament which have been briefly stated as Christ’s coming FOR His people first and thereafter His coming WITH His people. This, perhaps, is all right in general though it needs amplification.

In John 14:3 and 1 Thessalonians 4:14 ff we are clearly told that the Lord Jesus will come for His own. He will take them away from earth to the Father’s house. He

will come for their blessing and the consummation of all their hopes. It will result in the resurrection of the sleeping saints and the transformation of the living ones. It is altogether unheralded by time-marks or sign-marks. This is the present hope of the Church. We should be watching daily for His return. Nothing must of necessity transpire, so far as Scripture states, before He thus comes. It is the believer's ever present hope, and for that reason no directions are given him in the Epistles as to how he should act either in view of death or in view of the unprecedented trouble that is to come on the earth. His hope is that he is looking for a Saviour from Heaven who will transform his body of humiliation that it may be fashioned like unto His body of glory (Phil. 3:21).

This seems to have escaped the attention of the saints for many centuries: they had no understanding, it would appear, of the distinctive hope that is theirs, distinct from that of the Jewish people who will yet be taken up by God again.

If we fail to perceive the peculiar hope of the Church as being that of Christ's coming for the saints, we shall find ourselves in a maze of difficulties from which we shall find it impossible to extricate ourselves. For example, in Matthew 24 there is not a word about His coming for the saints but rather His coming to earth, to initiate judgments on sinners. It will be preceded by unequalled and unprecedented tribulation so that life will hardly be worth living. The Olivet discourse recorded in Matthew 24 is time-marked, and sign-marked, as will be apparent to any who carefully read the whole chapter.

When the Lord comes for His saints it will be for their blessing. But when He comes with them (as Col. 3:3 and Rev. 19 clearly show He will) it will be for judgment on men on earth. When He comes for His saints, He meets them in the air. When He comes with them, He comes to earth. When He comes for them, one person will be taken for heavenly blessing and the other left for judgment later. But when He comes to earth and introduces His judgments, one will be taken away by judgment and the other will be left for millennial blessing.

This is not propounding a theory: we are not entitled to do this. But let the reader soberly read the chapters that relate to these things and he will find that what we say is incontrovertible. All we plead for is that he should read having regard to the context, and interpret consistently. He should not import into the passages pre-conceived notions.

The writer begs leave to refer the reader to two recently published books —"Jesus the Christ" which is a survey of Matthew's Gospel, and this deals with the coming of the Lord to earth. Also "Concerning the future" which, among other things, deals with His coming for His saints to the air. Plainly all that is said in them cannot be condensed into this article.

We wish that we could say that this is one of the things that is most surely believed by us. But Satan has, of late, brought in a spate of strange ideas which are bewildering God's people.

We freely admit that we dare not build doctrine on the Old Testament histories, but surely they are pictorial methods of teaching the ways of God, and when we see

the New Testament statements illustrated in the Old, Testament we must reach the conclusion that God has recorded the history in order to confirm our faith.

What shall we say of Asenath united in martial bonds to Joseph who was in power and glory, whilst his own brethren (figure of the Jew) were in affliction? Or of Zipporah, united to Moses in marriage whilst his own brethren were in affliction in Egypt? Or of those who had a preview of the hidden king Jehoash, and who later were with the king when he came forth? They lose much who fail to discern the purposed ways of God in times yet to come from these records.

As we have said, judgment for earth follows the coming back to earth of its rightful King. But there are other judgments. It is a mistake to bunch them all together as though they all took place simultaneously. Before the judgment of the nations on earth of which Matthew 25 speaks, the Judgment-seat of Christ at which all those who have been caught away will appear, will have taken place. For they will be in possession of their kingdom-rewards when they return with the King. Read for example Luke 19:17. After the Judgment seat will be the Judgment of the nations: and a millennium (or more) after that there will be the Judgment of the Great White throne at which all the lost will appear (Rev. 20). Both the judgment of the nations and that of the Great White Throne result in eternal punishment (see Matt. 25:46 and Rev. 20:15). The Scriptures nowhere envisage the complete annihilation of the being of any man. He is an eternally existent creature to spend eternity in either one of two places.

And here we may take advantage of saying that the record of the rich man Lazarus given in Luke 16:19ff gives the lie to a vast number of heresies abroad today. It denies universalism, for one was saved and one was lost. It denies a second chance, for an impassable gulf was fixed. It denies sleep of the soul, for each was conscious of his state. It denies non-eternal punishment for there is no question of the cessation of either condition. It denies conditional immortality — for each was eternal in existence unconditionally. It denies Spiritism for it was impossible for anyone from the regions of the dead to go to those alive on earth. It denies purgatory, for the punishment was not remedial, it was consequential on the life lived on earth and was punitive.

A careful reading of Matthew 25 will show that the Judgment of the nations on earth differs in material respects from the final judgment of the Great White Throne. There will be those who are left to enter millennial blessing on earth. God has determined to vindicate and honour His Son in the very place where He was so grossly dishonoured and refused His rights. The result of that will be that the nation of Israel will be restored and re-instated: they will be repentant and regenerated. We must not suppose that God intends to bless the Jew as he is now in his unregenerate and anti-Christian state. He will be taken through the fires of persecution, and the vail wilt be taken off from his heart and when that vail of unbelief is removed his confessional lament will be Isaiah 53.

He will then be made the head of all the nations, and in Christ and in His people all the other nations will be blessed.

Moreover, the creation will be delivered from the bondage of corruption and brought into the liberty of the glory of the sons of God (Rom. 8:21). This explains such passages as Isaiah 11 and 65 in which we have poetically set forth the wondrous changes that will be wrought on the earth and the animal creation. Although it is poetry it does not lack literal reality. It is inconsistent to interpret certain parts literally and other parts otherwise.

God intends to purge this world of all that offends and to make it the scene of the displayed glory of His Son, and associated with Him His redeemed people. It will then be not only to the “praise of the glory of His grace” but also to “The praise of His glory.” It will display to all the vast universe of principalities and powers, mights and dominions what God is: He will be known by His doings.

And so we bring this series to a close. These are the things that we believe. We cannot explain them but we believe them. They fill us with joy and peace and hope.

Things Which Are Surely Believed Among Us (Part 12) (Apr 1964)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 10 No. 4, Apr 1964.

The phrase, “Things which are most surely believed among us” is to be interpreted in no sectarian sense. “Food for the Flock” does not foster sectarianism. The phrase has been extracted from Luke 1:1, and, in using it as a caption for a series of articles touching our Faith, we wish to imply that those responsible for the production of the magazine unreservedly believe all that is contained in “the Scriptures of Truth,” and they write for that large body of Christians who share their like faith. All over the world, and at all times, God has those who like Paul say, “ I believe God.”

Seeing that our beliefs are based on Holy Scriptures, it follows that we should first consider the nature of those Scriptures, in order to satisfy ourselves that our faith is well-founded. Our final paper, therefore, will relate to…

The Church

In our last paper we considered the Person of the Holy Spirit and remarked that this present age is one uniquely characterized by His presence on earth. The Church, which is the Body of Christ, was born on the Day of Pentecost.

The word “Church” (ekklesia) means a called-out and a called-together company and may apply to either the nation of Israel who was called out to Egypt (Acts 7:38) or to a mass of people gathered together either by random or by arrangement. When applied to believers of

the present era it relates to the Body of Christ (Gal. 1:24).

The Body of Christ, called by the Lord Jesus (Matt. 16:18) “My Church” did not exist whilst He was here on earth. It could not. It could only come into being consequent upon the glorification of Christ at the right hand of the Father and on the descent and indwelling of the Holy Spirit, who would thereby join every individual believer, not only one to the other in inseparable union but with Christ, as the Head, in Heaven.

Seeing that such circumstances did not and could not exist prior to the Pentecost of Acts 2 it follows, therefore, that nothing like the Church which is the Body of Christ existed or could exist before that time. It was altogether “new” (Eph. 2:15) and is so spoken of by Paul. In fact, it was a “mystery,” that is, a concealed thing not revealed until such time as it was formally communicated to the holy apostles and prophets of New Testament times (Eph. 3:5).

It is altogether a mistake to suppose that the Church existed in Old Testament times, and many of the captions at the head of pages and chapters in some Bibles in the Old Testament are most misleading and inaccurate. The Body of Christ did not exist in Old Testament times for the Lord Jesus spoke of “My Church” as a yet future thing even in His day: He spoke of it as something yet to be built. Nor does it form the subject of Old Testament prophecy, for such prophecy has always to do with earth and God’s doings therein. But the Church, the Body of Christ, is, to alter the simile, as a great sheet let down from Heaven and caught up to Heaven (Acts 10:11-16), though within it

are all kinds each and all of whom have been cleansed by the blood of Christ. But its origin is heavenly and its destiny is heavenly: its sojourn on earth is but incidental: its true home is elsewhere.

The New Testament envisages but two things in this matter, namely, the Universal Church which embraces every true believer from the day of Pentecost until the moment of its translation to meet the Lord in the air: and secondly, local churches each of which is a microcosm of the whole. It knows no other thing than these two. Plainly there are differences but there are also parallelisms. There is no such thing as 'believers receiving into or putting away from the Universal Church: nor is there any possibility of the mixture of true and false in that. But into local churches saints receive and betimes, regret-ably, have to put out: into it may creep men unawares, who should have had no entree thereinto. Failure marks the local churches but no such failure can mark the Universal.

The sum total of believers on earth at any one time (save at the very beginning when the state did not last very long) does not represent the Universal Church, nor can it represent the local church. It, therefore, is a mistake to speak of the "Church of God on earth." The phrase "Church of God," wherever used in the New Testament always relates to a local church in some particular place, and is never employed to refer to the aggregate of all believers on earth at one and the same time.

This being so, it follows that it is a mistake to speak of a church, appending thereto the name of a Continent or the name of a country. We refrain from mentioning any particular continent or country lest we should appear to

be attacking any one section of believers, a thing which is remotest from our desires. But it is good to be clear and accurate. There were such things as “churches of Galatia” (Gal. 1:2) but there is no such thing as “the church of Galatia.” In fact, to add any restrictive word to the word Church, be it the name of church town or country or continent, be it the name of an order of church ‘government or the name of a Christian ordinance, be it the name of believers to any of which all are entitled, it but to form a sect. And sectarianism is a work of the flesh to be condemned and uprooted (Gal. 5:20. R.V.).

Nor should any company claim to be the church of God’ in any particular locality. An examination of the Scriptures will show that the definite article is persistently omitted in all such references. It is “church of God,” (1 Tim. 3:15), “pillar and ground of the truth,” “house of God,” “temple of God,” (1 Cor. 3:16), “Body of Christ” (1 Cor. 12:27). The reason for this would appear to be that the Spirit of God, knowing beforehand the sadly divided state into which believers would fall, made this safeguard against any claiming an exclusive monopoly in church position to the exclusion of other genuine believers who, for some cause or other, were not in that particular company.

Ideally, all the believers in one place should meet together and not in separate companies. Actually, however, such is not the case. The ship has all gone to pieces and believers are found on various planks. The broken condition has not the approval of God’s spirit, nor should it be regarded as merely the equivalent of so many different regiments making up the one army. The divisions among believers should bow the heads of all in

shame. None should add an iota to further division. But to mend the wreckage is beyond the power of any now. To attempt to do so would be to open the door to compromise and to run all the dangers which are being encountered in modern ecumenical endeavours. Each believer should seek, with other believers, to follow the pattern set out in the Scriptures, and to show the utmost love to saints who think otherwise.

We have said the Church began at Pentecost. The method of its growth was by the plain and Spirit-empowered preaching of the Gospel which resulted in the gaining of believers, who proclaimed their faith by their submission to water baptism, thereafter meeting with the other believers for the purposes of prayer, instruction in the Word and the observance of the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:42). No better method has since been found: it is within the reach of all: indeed, is the duty of all. Only confessed believers should find their place in the local church, none others daring in those far away early days to join themselves with such (Acts 5:13). Today it is different, and to belong to some church is, in some quarters, fashionable and attractive to mere religionists who have had no vital work effected in their souls.

In early Christian times the enemies of the Church were twofold, religious and political. The Book of the Acts begins with religious persecution and ends with political persecution. It is so today in many parts of the world, for the religious world is no more cordial to the simple gatherings of believers than is the political. We must beware lest tolerance lure us into a friendship with the world which is enmity to God. Balaam and Balak still work hand in hand: so, too, do Ahab and Jezebel, and

Herod and Herodias. Erstwhile enemies become friends when they have a common object of persecution. The beast yet to come, and the scarlet dressed and drunken woman who rides it, will have no mercy for the simple follower of Christ. She is drunken with the blood of the saints (Rev. 17:16).

But we must remark other things. Local churches are never envisaged in the New Testament as federated together under one earthly head. Each has the character of a body, and its only Head is Christ in Heaven. Barnabas exhorted the Antiochan believers to “cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart.” (Acts 11:23). He did not encourage them to submit to any encyclicals ‘which ‘might have come from the Metropolitan church at Jerusalem. Although Barnabas had come from that church he did not put the Antiochan believers under their jurisdiction. They were an independent church solely responsible to Christ. Yet, independency must not be regarded as equating indifference. There is plainly an invisible line of fellowship between those simple companies of believers who follow the same Scriptures, form their habits by them, and are found doing the same things. If there is uniformity, it will be the result of a like understanding of the Scripture. Where there is disconformity it will be the product of a failure to interpret the Scriptures in precisely the same way, but that should not result in a breach: nor should it justify refusal to receive those who may come from a company that does not practise precisely what is done at the other place.

No church has the right to interfere with another in the administration of its internal affairs. We repeat it is solely responsible to the Lord. Not one of the churches

to which Paul wrote is called upon to rectify the wrongs in another church. Not one of the churches to which the Lord wrote in the Apocalypse is enjoined to rectify the wrongs of another church. And there is not the slightest hint of one church excommunicating another. Excommunication has to do with individuals and never with churches. One can put a person out of a church but what can a church be put out of, unless it be some federation which altogether lacks scriptural sanction?

Plainly, not every one in a local church is entrusted with all the gifts which are given to another. The Spirit of God has distributed the gifts according to His will (1 Cor. 12:11). Not all the gifts are concentrated in one man, nor is any one gift to be found in every man (1 Cor. 12:29). It follows therefore, that a local church should not be enchained by public exercises restricted to one man, nor should it be embarrassed by being left to the unlettered acttivities of every man. Only those qualified by the gifts of the Spirit to exercise themselves publicly should do so. Some companies of believers who have rejected one-man ministry have fallen into the distressing snare of an any-man talker. Other companies on the other hand, which have saved themselves from the latter snare have deprived themselves of the valuable potential help that is choked at its source by human innovations. How many a godly man is found sitting in the pew when he should have been on his feet instructing and helping the saints! Yet the arrangements are such that to do so would result in his being charged with brawling or the like. Yet, on the other hand, how often elsewhere are there to be found those who occupy the floor and inflict their utterances on the gathered

company, making manifest their own shame, which is apparent to all but themselves.

The remedy for this is the recognition of gifts given by the risen Head, distributed by the Spirit, to certain saints. And the further recognition that a man is not the proper judge of his own preaching: that must rest with the “other” prophets who are competent to evaluate the worth of his utterances (1 Cor. 14:29).

There is a remarkable unity and diversity in the local church. As a body it is a unity and each should function for the well-being of the whole. But in that body the members have differing functions, and there should be no acrobats when the saints are met together. Yet how often in some places is there to be found the endeavour of one member to perform the function which plainly pertains to another (1 Cor. 12:16-21).

All this is so contrary to what is to be found in organized Christendom. Where man has sought to produce a something which corresponds, in part, to effete Judaism and, in part, to corrupt Paganism, the result has been organization in which the Spirit of God has no place whatsoever and the prerogatives of the Godhead have been usurped by the creature. The crying sin of Christendom is infidelity as to the presence on earth of the Holy Ghost.

But should not a church be governed, or is it a place where all and sundry may do as they please? Paul specially wrote his letter to Timothy to apprise him how men should behave in the House of God (1 Tim. 3:15). It is God’s House and His rule should obtain therein. That rule is to be discovered in that letter. There are exercises which are appropriate to the men only, and

forbidden to the women. In the church God has furnished ‘overseers’ who care for the spiritual well-being of the flock (1 Tim. 3:1). In it also He has given servants who do what is requisite in material and other matters (Tim. 3:8).

Unhappily the words have not been fairly translated in the A.V. or the R.V. Recognized ecclesiastical terms had not to be altered and the translators were, therefore, trammelled: they were not free to tell the readers that “baptize” means “immerse;” that “bishop” means “overseer,” or that “deacon” means merely a servant. Had they done so they would have exposed the unscriptural nature of hierarchical system which had been for so long and so largely in vogue. They dare not run this risk.

Christendom has its so-called bishops over many churches, but the New Testament envisages a multiplicity of overseers in one church. Christendom and its bishoprics involve necessarily a union of churches under one ‘see’ but no such thing is owned in the New Testament.

And it is back to that Testament that we should all come. Ecclesiastical history can only warn us of the errors both in doctrine and practice into which others have fallen. But there is a far better way, and that is to go back to the fountain head and learn from the pure unsullied river of holy Scripture what is the will of the Lord. We should then know that a local church is not a stone or brick building: it is a company of believers in the Lord Jesus, few or many as the case may be, who are gathered together to His name (Matt. 18:20), and among whom the Holy Spirit is dwellings. Its meetings are not

secret, they are open to inspection by all and sundry, and where the Spirit is working in power it may be anticipated that some of such observers will fall down and acknowledge that God is among them of a truth (1 Cor. 14:25).

The Lordship of Christ (Aug-Sept 1965)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 11 No. 7, Aug-Sept 1965.

We did not live in those days when the Ruler of the old Roman world was called LORD. The notion of the divine right of Kings has been temporarily exploded, though to be sure it will be revived in days yet to come, when the Man of Sin will set himself up in the temple of God claiming that he is God, and demanding the worship of all within his jurisdiction (2 Thess. 2:4; Rev. 13:15).

The believer, by the Spirit of God calls Jesus “Lord” (1 Cor. 12:3) and rightly so, because not only is He so spoken of in the Old Testament (Psalm 110:1 and Matt. 22:22, 43 and 44) but by His resurrection from the dead “God has made (i.e. vindicated) that same Jesus … both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). At His birth it was announced that the One born was “Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11), yet during His lifetime it was evident that man in general, and the disciples in particular, did not fully understand the fact. After He was raised from the dead Thomas called Him “My Lord” (John 20:28), and Peter so proclaimed Him, but the mass of mankind did not believe it. The good news, however, was spread far and wide that “If thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead thou shalt be saved” (Romans 10, 9). The acknowlegment, then, of the Lordship of Christ is vital if one is to be saved from the penalty of his sins, as well as if the life is to be adjusted to the glory of God and the good of its owner. In these papers

we shall seek to set out something of what the Scriptures teach touching this matter.

He is Lord of All

Thus declared Peter in the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:36). This bracketed phrase must, indeed, have struck the centurion with astonishment. That the claim of universal lordship should be made for Jesus the Nazarene was nothing if not remarkable. Peter is emphatic. Of Him alone could this be said: He, and He alone, is Lord of all. And His Lordship extends not only to persons, Jew and Gentile, all men alike, but also to "all things." The limitless immensity of the universe is now-a-days acknowledged by man as the result of his scientific discoveries, but little do most scientists appreciate that the Universal Lord of all the domain, a fraction of which bewilders them, is the Christ of God, the babe of Bethlehem's manger, the sufferer on Calvary's Cross. This is a truth which should bring the utmost peace to the hearts of God's people, for that Lordship is not a mere nominal one, it is one that He actively exercises in the interests of His own now, as one day He will actively enforce it to "the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:11).

Even the winds and the waves obeyed Him. The fish brought the money to His feet. The demons released their captives at His bidding. Disease and death vanished from His presence. He, by whose word creation in the first instance came into existence, is the One who upholds it now, and by His miracles displayed that He was and still is Lord of all things.

His Lordship did not commence with His birth, much less with His resurrection. David addressed Him thus

(Psalm 110:1) for He was eternal, His birth not being the commencement of His being. The Hebrew word Adon has its counterpart in the New Testament Greek word Kurios, and both words have a wide territory of meaning, such as Sir, Owner, Master. The Lord of all Power and Might condescended to enter human existence, not at its source in the days of Adam, but midway down the stream, when many generations had played their little part in life and had passed away; and thus He who was the root whence David sprang became also his offspring: hence it was that the Psalmist “in spirit” designated as his Master, One who was to be raised up out of his own tribe and family.

Not merely is He Lord of all things, but He is also Lord of all people. “The same Lord of all is rich unto all that call upon Him” (Rom. 10:12). Peter, under the direction of the Spirit, had gone outside the bounds of Judaism with the gospel of God’s grace, and though this was an initial ministry and not permanent for him —for he was the Apostle of the circumcision (Gal. 2.8), it was perpetuated by the preaching and writings of the Apostle Paul who was entrusted with the gospel of the uncircumcision (Gal. 2:8). “Christ both died and rose, and revived, that He might be Lord both of the dead and living” (Rom. 14:9). His Lordship is over all people without limitation. That is why, in a future day, every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord no matter whether they are in Heaven, on earth or in the infernal regions (Phil. 2:10-11).

There are those who voluntarily and gladly now, in time, confess Him as Lord and, indeed, call Him “My Lord.” David did so before He became incarnate (Ps. 110:1); Elizabeth did so at His incarnation (Luke 1:43); Mary did

so when He was dead (John 20:13); Thomas did so when He was raised (ibid v. 28); and Paul acknowledged Him as “My Lord” when He saw Him in glory (Phil. 3:8). Have we really done this? If you will examine the lives of all these persons, despite any failures that may be detected therein, you will find that this acknowledgment affected their conduct and so moulded their lives that they are worthy of our emulation. David was “the man according to God’s own heart,” whatever we, with a fallen nature that ever loves to grasp at the unsavoury, may say touching his sin with Bath Sheba and its shocking concomitants. Elizabeth’s long married life had been governed by the Lordship of Christ (see Luke 1, 6). Whatever may be said of Thomas’ scepticism, we cannot but believe that in reverence he shrank from implementing his own suggestion, his words expressing the deep and lasting conviction of his heart. And who can doubt that Mary’s whole life from the time of her mighty deliverance was governed by the glad surrender of herself entirely to her Owner-Lord? And the converted history of Saul of Tarsus, which began with the word “Lord” is eloquent testimony to the fact that it was not in word only, but in deed that he owned Christ Jesus as his Lord.

Indeed, it was his habit when referring to Him historically to give Him the title “Lord Jesus.” For instance, in referring to the grace of the Lord Jesus, who “though He was rich yet for our sakes He became poor” (2 Cor. 8:9), he did not speak of “Jesus” but gave Him His title. Similarly, when he says “The night in which the Lord Jesus was betrayed” (1 Cor. 11:23). How strange, then, that so many today fail to give Him His due when speaking or preaching of Him, yet they

ascribe to His apostles the prefix “Saint” to which they are not specially entitled above any other of His people! We should eschew this snare.

But there are those who “deny the Lord that bought them” (2 Peter 2:1). Here, confessedly, the word “despot” is used, but the gist is the same. They repudiate His proprietary rights over them, whose they were by creation and by whom they have been purchased when “He sold all that He had, and bought the field” in order to acquire the treasure within it (Matt. 13:44). “Our lips are our own: who is lord over us?” they say (Ps. 12:4). They are utterly lawless, insubordinate, rebellious. But their day will come to an end. His Lordship implies His deity.

Implies His Deity

This is seen in the use of the word Kurios in the New Testament for the word Jehovah in the Old. Kurios is Greek and Jehovah is Hebrew, and Isaiah 40:3 is quoted in Matthew 3:3, which respectively gives these words. The identification is indubitable. John was the forerunner, preparing the way of Him who was God manifest in flesh. There are many such passages in the New Testament, and sometimes it is not easy to determine whether the title refers to the Lord Jesus or to God, the statements concerned being applicable to both because they are co-equal each with the other. This is all the more remarkable seeing that the early Christians were, for the most part, Jews and, therefore monotheistic. They could not on any account sanction the thought of more than one God, but they saw, by faith, in the person of the Lord Jesus “the true God” (1 John 5:20). In fact, it may be that James uses the

conjunction “and” in an explanatory way in his Epistle (1:1) and we might read his words as “James, a servant of God, and of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

We must not suppose that everyone who addressed the Lord Jesus by the word Kurios recognized this truth. Sometimes, indeed very often, in the days of His flesh those who approached Him thus meant no more than “sir” or “master,” an acknowledgment of superiority with the view of getting a need met. This is clearly seen in the English version of John 4:11 and the reader will discern other like cases. In John 9:36 the word “Lord” appears to have the lesser sense: but in verse 38 the greater, for the erstwhile blind man believed.

The recognition of this will give us to see the true significance of the word “worship” in its many occurrences in the Gospels. It does not always imply that the worshipper intelligently apprehend the deity of the One before him. It often was no more than an act of respect, specially in view either of need or of gratitude. But the title Lord, certainly denotes authority.

Denotes Authority

This is clearly seen in such a passage as John 13:13 and 14. The apostles called the Lord Jesus “Master (Teacher) and Lord,” but the Lord Jesus reverses the order and speaks of “Lord and Teacher.” The circumstance was that of His having washed the disciples feet: He had given them a lesson in action, not in speech. That action called for imitation, and such imitation could only be acknowledged as a binding duty if they recognized His Lordship over them. How easy it is for us all to be more occupied with the Word than with practice. Luke records “all that Jesus began both to do and to teach” (Luke 1:1),

putting action before speech. The two on the Emmaus road spoke of the Lord as one “mighty in deed and word before God and all the people” (Luke 24:19), and here in the Upper Room the Lord Himself places His authority before His teaching. For if His authority be repudiated His teaching will have no effect. But own His Lordship, then His teaching at once becomes authoritative and binding.

It was this that Paul sought to press on the Corinthians, who were apt to ignore his teaching. “If any think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord. If he does not recognize this, he himself should not be recognized” (1 Cor. 14: 37-38 NEB). Paul was not imposing on the Corinthians his own fancies or whims, for they could never be binding. But the Lordship of Christ implies that His word has the effect of a command, and calls for prompt obedience.

Is this the reason why there is everywhere so much departure from scriptural patterns; why the writings of Paul are brought into question; why there seems to be a desire to evade the plain teaching of the epistles under the plea that they are written for conditions that then existed —which conditions do not obtain in our day? Many fail to see that such writings embody principles which are applicable at all times.

The reader would find it a most profitable study to go through Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians and note how frequently he speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ our Lord, the Lord Jesus, and so on. It is in verses 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 10 of the first chapter to say nothing more

of the rest of the Epistle. He speaks of the “Lord of glory” (2:8): “the mind of the Lord” (2:16); services given by the Lord (3:5); the knowledge of the Lord (3:20); the examination at the coming of the Lord (4: 4-5); and so we could go on through the whole letter. The Lordship of Christ is the authority for disciplinary action (ch. 5) and the demand of cleanness of life (ch. 6). On his authority Paul can legislate in regard to marital relationships (ch. 7). To us, he says, there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ (8:6 RV). It is the Lord who has regulated touching the maintenance in material things of His servants (9:14). No less than seven times does he use the title in connection with the Lord’s Supper (ch. 11, vv. 23-32). The title stands at the gateway of the apostolic teaching touching church gatherings (12:3) and the whole of chapters 12-14. Both Paul and Timothy work under the same Lord and their plans are subject to His permissive will (16:7-10).

One can imagine that the Lord, who walks in the midst of the lampstands (Rev. 1.) would say to many today “Why call ye Me Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say” (Luke 6:46). It will not suffice to say that we have preached: we have done many wonderful things; we have eaten and drunken in His presence (Luke 13:26). That will be of no avail in that day. It is all too easy for us to rest on the doctrine — and it is a scriptural one — of the eternal security of the believer and yet so to live that we repudiate day by day His claims of Lordship. That repudiation shows that we are not true believers, and are not entitled to claim the security which belongs alone to those who in truth “confess Jesus as Lord.” These are solemn thoughts, and those of us who are

most vocal and who are most before the eyes of our brethren need, of all men, to be the most careful.

Personal Responsibility

Each one has a responsibility to the Lord and this Paul enforces when dealing with matters in which believers do not see eye to eye. The reader should peruse Romans 14 and the early part of chapter 15. He speaks of the master (kurios) in 14:4; of the Lord no less than three times in verse 6; and likewise three times in verse 8. He cannot stress it too much. We are not responsible to our brethren for our actions — for our liberties or for our forbiddings, but to the Lord, and each of us will give an account of himself to God. This is often forgotten and we are prone to draw a line which our brethren must toe because it is one which suits us. But not all have the same faith or the same liberty. Some are weak in their conscience, and others are strong. We must not despise nor must we condemn. They are our brethren for whom Christ died: why then should we despise them? We are not invested with judicial authority over them: why then should we judge them? It will suffice if we can give a satisfactory account of ourselves in respect of things which we allow or disallow in our own lives. That is as much as we can manage.

There Is One Lord (Oct 1965)

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It is not a little remarkable that in the epistles of Paul to the Ephesians and the Colossians, which, as is well-known, are complementary each of the other, the title ‘Lord’ occurs much less frequently in the doctrinal sections than it does in the hortatory part. This can be readily checked by the reader. The lesson is plain: doctrine is given not to inform the mind merely, but to affect the behaviour. The doctrine of Christ must be held in recognition of the claims of Christ.

Everyone in the Church has professed to have acknowledged Jesus as Lord, as we saw when considering Romans 10:9. Each one is, therefore, expected to “Sanctify Christ as Lord” in his heart (1 Peter 3:15) recognizing the supremacy of His commands, whatever the world may say. They must get to know what is “well pleasing to the Lord” (Eph. 4:10); they should “understand what the will of the Lord is” (ibid v. 17).

Paul proceeds to set out this ‘will’ of the Lord in some detail. Wives are to be subject to their own husbands as to the Lord. Husbands are to imitate Christ as the Lord (as some mss. read 5:29) nourishes and cherishes His bride the Church, so should the husband his wife. Children are to obey their parents in the Lord (6:1): that is, not ‘parents in the Lord’ but they are to “obey … in the Lord,” because of their responsibility and subjection to Him. Fathers are to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (v. 4). Servants are to render their service to their masters with good-will, a

cheerful mind, as if they were serving the Lord and not men. It is the Lord who will make recognition of what has been done to Him (v.8.). Masters, too, are to be reciprocal in their treatment of these servants, for they must remember that, in common with their servants, they each have the same 'Master' (Kurios) in Heaven who is no respector of persons. It will be a constant fight and they must 'be strong in the Lord' (v.10). Thus the Lordship of Christ impinges on every department of our lives, and on everyone of us who own Him. None can escape his duty.

All this may be summed up in the words of Colossians 2:6. "As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him" (2:6) and again, "Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (3:17), and Paul goes over the same ground of relationships again in each case stressing the claims of our Lord.

The reasonableness of this is apparent. We are not our own, we are His property. We have, therefore, no right of independent action. This is not a slavery such as men were accustomed to in those days, when the slave had no rights whatsoever. This is a slavery gladly accepted in which the mind and will gladly consent to subordinate all personal interests to the rightful claims of Him who has bought us with His blood.

Our social conditions today differ from those which existed in Paul's day but this is all the more perilous for the believer. The fact that he renders contractually agreed service to his employer for so much payment, for so long a term of service per day or per week, does not nullify the obligations devolving on him as a Christian. They should 'please' their employers 'well in all things'

showing scrupulous honesty and reliability: and there should be no answering back (see Titus 2:9-10), for any behaviour that fails to attain to this standard will bring reproach on the Christian gospel.

In addition to all this, we have to remember that we are subjects of the state, whether our supreme ruler be a Queen or President. We are to be submissive “for the Lord’s sake” (1 Peter 2:13). That is to say, these “powers that be” having been “ordained of God” should be unreservedly obeyed unless divine claims are involved. We should “render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s” as well as render “to God the things that are God’s.” We will then render to all their dues: tribute (taxes on persons and goods) to whom tribute is due; custom (taxes on merchandise) to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour (Romans 13:7). In this way we shall “put on the Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 14) making it plain that our submissiveness to the state springs not from a sense of national duty, but from the higher source of subjection to our Owner-Lord.

Thus the Lordship of Christ touches every department of the believer’s life, ecclesiastic, social, business, domestic, and it even reaches further. Some are entrusted with specific spiritual work, such as was the case with Archippus who was exhorted to take heed to the ministry which he had received “in the Lord,” that he fulfill it (Col. 4:17). The ellipsis may be filled out to read “in the service to the Lord” or “in relation to the things of the Lord” or “in the interests of the Lord.” It is a comprehensive phrase, declarative of responsibility to the One Who had entrusted him with the service. How necessary such an exhortation is today! If heeded it would eliminate much casualness in spiritual work, fits

and starts, hot and then cold, quick to accept a task but quicker to drop it. Because we cannot actually see the Lord, the propensity to be careless is all the more easy, but where there is a constant awareness of the Lord's commissioning there will also be the concurrent sense of complusion. Like the Lord we shall be found using the word 'must' in relation to our work. This, surely, is the force of what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:11. "Knowing, therefore, the fear of the Lord we persuade men." There loomed before him the prospect of the Judgment Seat of Christ, when all would come out in its true colours. How grievous it would be were there to be discovered at that time that, in the pursuance of his apostolic work, he had encouraged mixed and hypocritical motives, for at that day it will not only be that our work will be examined, our very motives will then be scrutinized also.

The happy event which will usher us into His presence is called The Rapture, a word of perfectly legitimate use, it according with the significance of the Greek word "Harpazo" which means a sudden transportation from one place to another. When Paul speaks of this, in writing to the Thessalonians, he uses the plain word 'Lord' no less than five times in the space of four verses. His disclosure is: "by the word of the Lord"; we remain unto the "parousia of the Lord"; it is "the Lord Himself shall descend"; we "meet the Lord in the air"; "we shall ever be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:15-18). Mark well the significance of this: Master and servant meet, and the servants gladly anticipate the meeting. As in the parables of the Pounds and the Talents, "the Lord" will than have returned and will "take a reckoning" with His servants. But in the Thessalonian passage that reckoning is not in view, but rather the termination of

the period of absence, and the meeting with the Lord and the reunion with temporarily lost loved ones.

However, we may well ask ourselves whether it is a real matter of joy to our hearts that we have the prospect of meeting Him Who is our “Lord.” We should never allow this world’s affairs to swamp the trust which has been committed to us. How dare we face our Lord if we are so doing, yet it is gravely to be feared that in these high-pressure times many of the Lord’s people are allowing themselves to be so overwhelmed with mundane material things that they can give little or no time to the spiritual, to the loss of their present well-being and the loss of a reward later. We need to adjust our priorities and to “seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness” being assured, on the word of His own promise, that all other requisite things will be added to us (Matt. 6. 33).

Paul’s Confidence

The fact of the Lordship of Christ gave Paul the utmost confidence in his adverse circumstances and he encouraged the saints in the same direction. To the Phillipians he wrote that they should be over-anxious in nothing: to allow their yieldingness to be known to all men, adding “the Lord is near” (Phil. 4.5). This does not appear to relate to His future coming but to His present proximity to the believer. He is not One afar off: He is near. Because of this we can “Rejoice in the Lord always.” He is over all. Men cannot have their way altogether, but only under His permissive will. It was so in the case of Paul’s last recorded letter. The Lord, the righteous judge, will give him the victor’s crown “at that day,” whatever such an unrighteous judge as Nero may

say or do. It is the Lord who will render to Alexander the coppersmith the appropriate reward according to his evil works. It was the Lord who stood beside Paul at his first defence when all others deserted him. He is confident that the Lord will deliver him from every evil work and preserve him unto His everlasting kingdom. Paul sees the Lord over all and his heart is at rest (2 Tim. 4:8-14).

If only we could encourage a similar confidence! When we see the Lord walking on the troubled waters of this life we can follow Him with an amazing superiority to all that surrounds us. But lose sight of this fact then we also are disturbed as well as the waters. “Lord, if it be Thou” enables one to tread the waves: but when the fact of His Lordship is lost to view then we cry “Lord save me” (Matt. 14, 28:30). We have to come back to it, realising that all is under His ultimate control. We have no real conception of the

Scope Of His Lordship

It embraces not merely the circumstances of time: not merely His claims over His redeemed people, and over mankind in general, but it extends into the spiritual realms, as is apparent from the scene depicted in Isaiah chapter 6. There the Lord (Adonai) is seated on the throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple. In the year that King Uzziah, who had intruded into the priestly office, died as a leper, Isaiah lifted his eye away from earth and saw on Heaven’s throne another King who also was a Priest. Behold the seraphic host, listen to their cry of worship, and note their reverence, their humility and their ready and speedy obedience. All tells the same fact that is depicted in the

fifth chapter of the Apocalypse — the Lord is the centre of Heaven's praise and worship and all angelic beings are at His command, to do His bidding, no matter whether it be for the good of His redeemed or for the judgment of His enemies. He is the 'Lord of the whole earth' and Supreme both in Heaven and earth.

Ambition (Jan 1968)

From Food for the Flock, Vol. 14 No. 1, Jan 1968.

It is a good thing for everyone to have an ambition. The base is crowded: the top is sparsely populated. To be contented with things as they are and not to be desirous of improvement betrays an apathy unworthy of any. Of course there are obstacles to be overcome; difficulties to be met and mastered if the object in view is to be attained, but that only makes for the building up of character. This is specially so when the ambition is of a spiritual kind for then spiritual character is developed.

Ambition may be of two kinds, that for one's own personal advancement or that for the attainment of an object with the view of benefitting others. Both have their proper place, though if we follow our Lord we shall ever be willing to give the benefit of others the first place. As a matter of fact the use of the word in the New Testament never has the thought of personal self-advancement. It always has an external object and its good as we shall see.

Unhappily at the present time, and it has ever been so, ambition is earthbound for the most part and the object of desire has been material advancement or earthly achievement. Very few seem to have a healthy spiritual Christ-like ambition.

Paul uses the word in its verbal form three times and, as might be expected, it is not always on a worldly plane. His word is philotimeomai, meaning literally a loving honour. Yet if the ambition is to be of a proper kind, the honour must be that given by the rightful person.

Earthly ambition when achieved is crowned with the acknowledgment of one's worldly superiors. It is not with this that Paul is concerned; the honour that he has in mind is that which is bestowed by God. Yet how many of us are like those to whom the Lord said "How can ye believe which receive honour one of another and seek not the honour that cometh from the only God?" (John 5:44). It is, admittedly, not always possible to be "well pleasing to God and approved of men" (Rom. 14:18), but if choice has to be made God has prior claim. Do we esteem the honour that comes from God more highly than that which men may bestow on us?

Paul uses the word once in relation to the believer's personal life, once in relation to the world of lost sinners, and once as to the believer's relationship to the Lord.

1 Thessalonians 4:11

"And that ye study to be quiet and do your own business and to work with your hands even as we charged you that ye may walk honestly toward them that are without and may have need of nothing" (RVm). The word study is the word "be ambitious." Paul had himself given an example of this very thing when in the midst of the Thessalonians by his own actions as witness (2 Thess. 3:8). He could, therefore, very forcibly enjoin them that "with quietness they work and eat their own bread." It was discreditable that any should not be working at all but were busybodies. There is a play on the Greek words, they were busybodies, doing no real business. They were interfering with other people's business. They were sponging on others. It should, however, be a thing to be aimed at that we should show a healthy

independence of others, having need of no one and of nothing.

The idleness of some of the Thessalonians at least may have sprung from an abuse of the doctrine which Paul had given touching the coming of the Lord. It is plain that he had taught them that this “coming” might occur at any moment, for its time was altogether unknown to any but the Father; and, therefore, abusing the teaching, they ceased to work while “waiting for God’s Son from Heaven.” They had forgotten the injunction “Occupy till I come.” Some, on the other hand, as would appear from 2 Thessalonians 3:10 may have been idlers independent altogether from what Paul taught. But whatever the cause, Satan always finds something for idle hands to do, and that something is never good: more likely than enough it will be interference into the affairs of others.

We are not much troubled now-adays with this kind of thing, but the great principle behind the exhortation is not without relevance. We should aim at a “walk,” a behaviour, that is honourable not only in the sight of our fellow believers but also in the sight of the world — “them that are without.” We should walk honourably (Rom. 13:13) and quietly. It is not the boisterous who is necessarily usefully active, for sometimes noise and work in our modern mechanised age do go together, but not always. Many are neither seen nor heard yet are very effectively working.

Paul is very practical; he not only can soar into high doctrines and plump depths of divine truth, but also can come down to earth as to daily living. “If anyone does not wish to work neither let him eat” (2 Thess. 3:10). Paul did not eat “any man’s bread for nought”; he paid

for it. He worked in labour and travail day and night in order not to be a burden to any of them. He forfeited his apostolic and evangelistic right in order to demonstrate in real life how believers ought to be occupied and so render themselves healthily independent of others. It is despicable to sponge on others when the capacity to work is not lacking.

The Ephesians were enjoined: “Let him that stole steal no more but rather let him labour working with his hands the thing which is good that he may have whereof to give to him that needeth” (Eph. 4:28). For “it is better to give than to receive” as said the Lord Jesus (Acts 20:35). The daily occupation of the believer should be that which is honourable: he should pursue an “honest occupation” (Titus 3:14 RVm) or “honest trade” (AVm). There are ‘lines’ which are unworthy of the Christian however lucrative they may be, but there are plenty of professions or trades open to the believer which he may worthily follow putting him in the happy position of faithfulness to God and independence of men, as well as providing for those of his own house and having wherewith by which he may help the hapless and the Lord’s work and servants.

Romans 15:20

In this passage Paul uses our word ‘ambitious’ in relation to his evangelistic and apostolic work. He had been specially commissioned by the Lord to go to the Gentiles and at the time of writing to the Romans, whose city he had not yet reached, he was able to report that he had thoroughly executed that charge in so extensive an area as from Jerusalem to Illyricum. A glance at the map will show how vast a territory this is. But Paul was

ever desirous of pressing on to ‘regions beyond’ those which he had already reached. His ambition was to go to places where the name of Christ was unknown, where the tidings of the cross had not yet come. His not having been to Rome did not spring from fear of Nero, or shame of the gospel (Romans 1, vv. 9 ff) but was caused by his being hindered many times despite his various attempts.

Now we must not be satisfied with reading this merely as a part of Paul’s autobiography. It has lessons for us which we must not fail to learn. The unevangelized heathen are not far from our doors today. True, there are few parts of the earth where the name of Christ has never at some time or other been named, even though heathen religions now hold sway. We must never forget we live late in the day — the eleventh hour — but we live in times when other men’s labours have, in many cases, disappeared due to the suppression of the ruling powers, or the judicial darkening of lands once highly favoured with the gospel, as to wit, North Africa. Often it is necessary in such places to start altogether afresh, laying the foundation because the present generation knows nothing whatever of what formerly had been done.

Look out, then, for such soil. It may be found in sections of the world’s vast cities or in some smaller town or area. The thing is to have the ambition to spread the gospel so that those who do not know it are informed of it, and that will entail your telling the man or woman with whom you next come in contact. Do not suppose that because you live in a so-called Christian country that its inhabitants know the gospel. Most have no idea of it for there are very few who faithfully preach it.

Had anyone challenged Paul why he went to the Gentiles and did not limit himself to the Jew, he would among his detailed answers have been able to cite Isaiah 52:15 (see Romans 15:21) as being his scriptural authority. He read the passage as having a voice to him and it inspired him with the desire to do the very thing named in the verse. Of course he knew its prophetical bearing, but he was then and there concerned with its present message. We should read Scripture in a like manner.

The matter seems to have been questioned in the Corinthian church and Paul himself meets the challenge in 2 Corinthians 10:14-16 not selfishly, restricting to himself the honour of taking the gospel to the “regions beyond” but encouraging the saints to have their part in the matter. Paul did not look for a ready-made audience, or hall, or other things. He went where none of these things were and pioneered the gospel, breaking up fresh ground. Others could follow up what he had done but he made it his ambition first to break new soil. It is not given to everyone now-a-days to do this: it requires young manhood, physical strength, vision, enterprise, courage, ambition. To the few that have such we should give every encouragement.

2 Corinthians 5:9

Here Paul and Timothy state that they “make it their aim whether at home or absent to be well-pleasing to Him.” It is important to read this in the R.V. for the question of our ‘acceptance’ with God is not in view. That is settled (Eph. 1:6.) But not all are well-pleasing to Him. The whole of the context must be read to see the force of this. Paul’s outward man, his physical frame, is perishing but the inward man is being renewed day by

day. His pre-occupation is not with things that are seen which are temporal, be they his afflictions or anything else, but with things unseen which are eternal. He has the earnest of the Spirit within giving him assurance as to the reality of unseen things; he has the vision of faith, for his judgment is not formed by external appearance. Indeed, eternal things were so real to him that he would perfer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. However, whilst in the body he made it his aim to be well-pleasing to the Lord, because he knew that there lay ahead of him the Judgment-Seat when everything and everyone would come out in his true light. He would be seen as the man that he actually is and not as the man that he might think himself to be or others might think him to be or to have been.

Every believer has to appear at the Judgement Seat and, therefore every believer should have the ambition to be well-pleasing to the Lord. Each will be discovered then as to what his true character is — the character that he has formed on earth will be revealed then. His physical body has been the instrument of doing things either good or worthless (phaula) and such actions are like boomerangs; they come back and leave their mark on one's character. They have been as bricks built into the character of our life. We are as it were running an account which will be balanced at the Judgment Seat; the good we have done will be on the credit side; the worthless we have done will be on the debit side of our heavenly register and the net result will be the character with which we will commence Eternity. Turn to Ephesians 6:8 and Colossians 3:25 (RVm): ponder these two passages. We shall receive the good things: we shall receive again the wrong. Things will then come

home to roost. Suffering loss will reduce proportionately the gain that we may have accumulated against that day.

In that day all the veneer will be stripped off. Any wax which has been used to conceal the cracks which we know to exist in our lives will then be melted in the sunlight of the presence of the Lord. We shall not then be able to wear a mask, nor would we wish to do so. We shall only be too happy to have everything brought to the surface and in the light of His holy presence to be manifested in its true or worthlessness, and to embark on Eternity free from all those things which may have robbed us of our reward or have militated against our being conformed to the image of God's Son.

These things, then, should be our ambition: (a) a quiet, godly industrious life; (b) a zeal to spread the knowledge of the name of Christ to as many as we can of those who have not heard of Him; and (c) to live so that we have the consciousness now and the acknowledgment later of our being well-pleasing to the Lord.

Could any ambition be better than this? Such will adjust every other ambition and subordinate them to these three priorities.