

Scripture Truth

October - December 2008

The Son of Man
The ministry of the Spirit
The just shall live by faith
Be strong for the next generation
Spiritual diagnostics for the local congregation

SCRIPTURE TRUTH

Editor: Theo Balderston

SCRIPTURE TRUTH is published every three months to expound the teaching of the Scriptures so that we “may be thoroughly equipped for every good work”.

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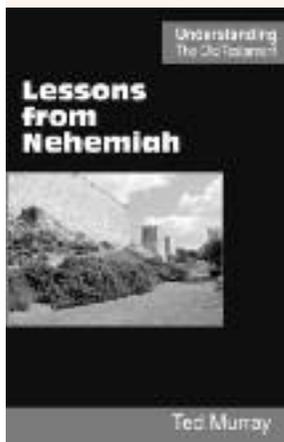
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“Lessons from Nehemiah” by Ted Murray

124 pages; Paperback: **£6.50 (including UK postage)**



Ted Murray's series of articles published between 2004 and 2008 in “Scripture Truth” has now been brought together and published in book form, complementing his earlier book “Lessons from Ezra”.

The story of Nehemiah is one of purpose, pluck, practicality, perspiration, preparation, praise and purification, permeated with prayer. Piloted by the Word of God, he leads the project to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, proving the purpose and power of God for His people.

As the story unfolds, practical lessons are presented for individual Christians and assemblies today.

Front cover photograph of Autumn at Howick Hall Arboretum, Northumberland

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All correspondence should be addressed to:

SCRIPTURE TRUTH Publications

31-33 Glover Street, CREWE, Cheshire CW1 3LD

Tel: 01270 252274

Fax: 01477 587454

Be strong for the next generation

Jonathan Hughes

“Sometimes I despair to hear older ones reminiscing about the good spiritual times in such and such a place in the fifties!” This lively article originated as a Truth for Today talk on London’s Premier Radio (www.truthfortoday.org.uk).

“You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 2:1).

Introduction

Do you remember your chemistry lessons? I always thought I was doing pretty well if the compound I made looked the right colour, or made the right smells. But that was never enough. We then had to split the compound into its constituent chemical elements, and learn how those elements could be further split up into subatomic particles. Was it really necessary? Yes, we were told. It would sharpen our understanding of the whole.



I want to do what I disliked in those chemistry lessons, and split 2 Timothy 2:1 into six bite-sized phrases. Hopefully, this will confuse no-one but rather sharpen the challenge regarding our personal role in the great scheme of the work that the Lord has committed to His church.

“You therefore”

Paul was nailing Timothy down, so to speak. In chapter one Paul had spoken of the gift that Timothy had. He had also referred to his own suffering because of serving God, and to his sorrow at being abandoned by others. As he begins chapter two, then, Paul tells Timothy that it is now up to him.

Timothy was maybe into his thirties and perhaps prone to timidity and introspection. Possibly he looked to others to take a lead, happy to do as he was told,

*As he begins chapter two, then,
Paul tells Timothy that it is now up to him*

and to remain in the huge shadow of Paul. Paul would have none of this. Knowing Timothy's gift, he says very directly to him that it is now his turn. Not the person next to Timothy, or somebody older who knew more, but "you Timothy, yes you!" Perhaps we see others growing old, and unable to do all they used to do. But then we look around for somebody else to do their job, fill their role. My wife recently said that she still felt only as old as when she was at university. I feel ready for a bath chair on Bournemouth promenade! Too often we shirk the responsibility God gives us by claiming youthfulness or age. Our attitude reminds me of the telling story I once saw on a tea towel:

"This is the story of four people named everybody, somebody, anybody and nobody. There was an important job to be done and everybody was sure that somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it, but nobody did it. Somebody got angry about that because it was everybody's job. Everybody thought anybody could do it but nobody realised that somebody wouldn't do it. It ended up that everybody blamed somebody when nobody did what anybody could have done!"

Let each one of us, especially the younger, take up the challenge, that the future of the testimony of Jesus Christ is *my* responsibility.



"My son"

Paul's affection for Timothy was clear. He looked at Timothy spiritually with all the concern and pride of an earthly father looking at a natural son growing into the man that he was to become. Today, however, we are familiar with the "skins" acronym – "spending the *kids'* inheritance *now*"! Such parents live for today at

the expense of the future. This attitude is completely unacceptable in the spiritual world. Dear older reader, the youngsters in your local church are your spiritual children! Don't think of them as the awkward ones who always want to change what you like, who do things that you would never have dreamed of. They are the ones who will have to continue your life work and maintain the truth and the testimony in tomorrow's world.

There is a challenging episode in the history of the Israelites in Joshua 15. Caleb had given his daughter Achsah in marriage to Othniel, who had earned his bride by occupying part of the land that God had given to the Israelites. As a marriage portion, Caleb gave his daughter land in the "South", the Negev, a dry, hard land. In visionary faith, Achsah says to her father (v.19, NKJV), "Give me a blessing; since you have given me land in the South, give me also springs of water. So he gave her the upper springs and the lower springs." Are we passing on an inheri-



Ein Avdat oasis, Negev Desert

tance with living springs, or dried-up springs? Sometimes I despair to hear older ones reminiscing about the good spiritual times in such and such a place in the fifties! *We are responsible for what we pass on, and for how we pass it on – in a living way, that has hope of future life, not in a dead way that only looks backward!* For Caleb, and for Paul, it simply would not do for things just to last out their declining years. They had a vision for the future. As long as the Lord leaves us here, He leaves us with a vision that has a future and with the responsibility to pass it on in such a way that it can continue in the future.

“Be strong”

No doubt Timothy could list many reasons why, with so many faults, he was not the man. Paul simply tells him simply to “Be strong”. Frequently the fighting is at its fiercest shortly before the end of the fight. It seems to me that in the historic plan of God for His church, this is exactly the time we are living in now. The victory is ours with Him. The Devil is a defeated enemy and knows that his time of influence is rapidly evaporating. So his attacks against all that is of God are increasingly frenetic. Attacks upon the family, upon the rule of law, upon the concept of right and wrong, upon absolutes, upon the authority of the word of God – all these point to the actions of the enemy. Without doubt today is the day to

be strong. Now is not the time to lose heart, to compromise with the world, to give up on the absolute truth of His word, to desert the position He has put me in. Jesus is coming again soon and then there will be no more need to struggle; but for now, be strong! Let us quietly join the ranks of the “strong” in Scripture who in their day stood up and were counted for God.



I think of Moses, and of Aaron and Hur who supported his weary arms (Exodus 17:12). The world would say it was shameful that an old man couldn't even have a rest after being out in the sun for so long. But for Moses partial victories were not enough. He would stay the course, until the victory was complete.

I think of Joshua, who in Joshua 10:12-13 prayed that God would stop the sun from setting so that he could fully defeat the Amorites. He was ready to forgo night-time rest to spare a future generation the danger of continued warfare against them.

I think of Shammah, one of David's mighty men (2 Samuel 23:11-12), who, when the Israelite army fled, stood his ground alone, fighting single-handedly to defend the field given to him by his father, and his father before him, and originally by God to his family. Was one field really so important? God had given it to him, and that made it priceless. In our day God has given us His word, and a place to live out that word. We ought not to devalue either by carelessly thinking that they do not matter.

Finally, I think of Mary of Bethany. Undoubtedly the hardest battle we will ever fight is with our old self – and its desire to be respected and comfortable. But in front of her family, friends and neighbours she took her hair to use as a towel to wipe the feet of Jesus (see John 12:3). How humiliating on a human level! Once Jesus had left, how the neighbours would smirk, whom she would have to face every day! And yet she gladly offered to Jesus her very self, because she, perhaps uniquely, had some insight into what the Lord was about to do.

These are ordinary men and women who stand out from the pages of the Bible because of their sacrifice and strength. Timothy, you too were to be strong like these, as are we in our day and in this generation!

“In the grace”

We do not fight this battle in our own stubbornness. Too often the destructive force of a stubborn individual has had terrible effects upon the people of God. But Timothy was to exercise this strength in *all* “the grace that is in Christ Jesus”. In the well-known acronym, grace is defined as “God’s riches at Christ’s expense”. Everything we do for Him is to be done in the power of the richness of God that has been given to us by the all-surpassing sacrifice of the Lord Jesus on the cross at Calvary. God’s grace would make us small in the fight. “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9). Our “being strong” should not lead us to dominate others by force, but rather to lead others in gentle humility.

And God’s grace is always more than enough for us whatever the circumstances. It was enough for Shammah, as, alone, he watched the Philistine army swarm into his field. It is enough for us. “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9). Unlike the Israelite army that left Shammah stranded, His grace will never leave us out on a limb.

And His grace is *exclusive*, for He is the God of all grace – there is no other source of supply! “But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you” (1 Peter 5:10). Mary of Bethany, in that eternal glory, will certainly not now be regretting the grace that empowered her to anoint the feet of Jesus. Would you have been left with your regrets at not having done so?

“And settle you!” – that’s how the verse ends. So often in this world we want to see results now, and resent the week-in, week-out routine of service. We need the grace to be strong *in persevering*. Do you remember stacking up dominoes as a child, then knocking one and watching all the others topple in turn? Our lives can be very much like those dominoes! If I am strong, it makes it that little bit easier for those who follow after me to be strong. But if I give up, then those who follow after me are

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going to find it much harder just to recover lost ground, never mind advancing. If we are to see God-honouring revival in 21st-century Britain (and it is still possible), then it will need individuals, you and me, together to be strong for Jesus, in the grace that He will liberally supply. Isaac Newton realised that his scientific achievements were only possible because of what others had done before him. Spiritually we need to gain this perspective. As we realise that we are indeed standing upon the shoulders of those who in their day were faithful to God, even to death, we need to realise that others will one day have to stand on our shoulders!

“That is”

We are not to read the verse as speaking of grace past or grace hoped for, but as *grace present*. We say that we believe that Jesus is building His church, but do we *really* believe it? Its practical consequences are profound. I might have chosen to live in another place and time. But Jesus has chosen that I should be a part of His church in the 21st century, in Liverpool, because that is where He has given the grace for me to be effective for Him, if I am obedient to His leading. In a day to come, His church will be revealed as perfect, and perhaps then I shall see why He put me where He did. But for now it is sufficient to know that the grace of God, that enables me to be strong, is available *now*. Today, whoever we are, let us realise that His grace will enable us to serve Him faithfully now, and to be strong now.

“In Christ Jesus”

As we draw this article to a close, we very much need a sense of belonging to Jesus. We are not called to be strong for a cause that is not our own. We are not taking on responsibility for something that means nothing to us. All that we do for Him, we do because we belong to Him. What is important to Him is important to us because we belong to Him. The truth of God’s word, lived out in reality, is important because it belongs to us. The desire to see souls saved belongs to us. The opportunity to remember Jesus in His death each week is important because it belongs to us. Because we are in Christ Jesus, those things that matter to Him should matter to us. As we realise this then let each one of us realise that Paul is speaking to us across the centuries: “You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.”

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you and me to be strong for Jesus,
in the grace that He will supply*

The just shall live by faith

Habakkuk 1:12 - 2:4

William John Hocking

*Much of the life of faith is about **waiting** in faith-testing circumstances. This was Abraham's experience, and certainly Habakkuk's, as this edited extract from an address delivered in 1942 shows. (Another extract appeared in ST. July 08) And God's answer to our faith equally tests us as to where our souls are: it is always Christ and the promises in Him. Editorial additions to complete the sense are in square brackets.*

Habakkuk's problem

[Habakkuk was perplexed. He had prayed to God about the sinfulness of the kingdom of Judah – its iniquity, violence, disregard of the Law, and unjust court judgments (1:3-4). God told him that as a result of their sinfulness He was bringing on them the Chaldean (Babylonian) invasion. This would in effect fulfil the dire warnings of Leviticus 26:31-34 and Deuteronomy 28:36-7. Habakkuk accepted this. He accepted both God's right to judge the "sinners in Zion" and also the need for the correction of His own true, but erring, people (1:12; cp. Isaiah 1:25-28; 33:14). Even the black prospect of the destruction of the kingdom that God had given to David did not cause Habakkuk to doubt God. He still called Him "my God", and clung to His unconditional promises to Abraham. "...Blessing I will bless thee...thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies... And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 22:17-18 KJV). Habakkuk

said, "We shall not die" (1:12) – not because he was "in denial" about the coming judgment, but whilst fully accepting its necessity. *This was faith indeed.*

But there was still one thing that bothered Habakkuk.] How could a righteous God use an unrighteous instrument? How could the God who hated iniquity, allow a more iniquitous, violent, and lawless power to discipline His own people for these sins? How could He let this cruel Babylonian monster dominate the earth and carry out its wicked schemes? "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil... Wherefore... holdest [thou] thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he... And makest men as fishes of the sea, as the creeping things that have no ruler over them?" (Habakkuk 1:13-14)

A man who catches fish in his net catches bad and good alike. Similarly the sweeping net of this all-conquering power caught everything within its

range. “They take up all of them with the angle, they catch them in their net... Shall they therefore empty their net, and not spare continually to slay the nations?” (1:15,17) That is, when they have conquered a few nations, shall they go on to conquer more, empty their net, and throw it out again?

Habakkuk's attitude

But at the end of this perplexed query Habakkuk says, “I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved” (2:1). Habakkuk's “tower”, on which he set himself, was his confidence in the everlasting God, and in His immutable promises. He named this God his “Rock” in 1:12 (Darby Trans., etc). *God* was Habakkuk's vantage ground and outlook point from which to await God's own answer to his question. We can take a lesson from this. There are things happening that we can never fathom, but we can always do this – take our stand upon the immutable foundation of God and His word. There is no trembling in that foundation. Stand upon that tower and you are safe. Then you can survey the landscape of the future, and look out for the vision to come before your eyes. Just wait for what God will say to you, what words He will put into your heart to answer rightly your dilemma.

“And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision” (2:2). The vision is

not described here. It was the way of God to speak to the Old Testament prophets by visions. Isaiah “saw the Lord... high and lifted up” (Isaiah 6:1).

Habakkuk's answer

Habakkuk's vision was of Christ Himself. This is the true interpretation, I think, of what Jehovah says here. In verse 3 He speaks of the delaying of the vision. “Though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.” This is dim and shadowy, but what is *concealed* in the Old Testament is *revealed* in the New. Christ is here concealed. We can conclude this, because when this text is quoted in Hebrews 10:37, the Spirit of God speaks particularly and clearly: “*He* that shall come will come, and will not tarry” (Hebrews 10:37). God had a Person before Him always in His purposes in this world. Adam had miserably failed, but the “seed of the woman” (Genesis 3:15) should deal with the serpent, extirpate evil from the world, and fill the once-defiled earth with glory to God and blessedness to man. Habakkuk's vision was the very vision that was before God Himself, of His Son who should come, and restore that which He “took not away” (Psalm 69:4)! Who else could it be? It is God's own Man, the “Man of His right hand” (Psalm 80:17); He is the One that “shall come and shall not tarry”.

The vision had to be *written*, that is, placed in permanent form, “plain upon tables [or, tablets], that he may run that

readeth it” (v.2). Why, “run”? It means that those who could discern Christ in the promises would find their whole hearts glowing with satisfaction and delight in Him, the Servant of God’s good pleasure, the One in whom is all the Father’s delight, and in whom all this trouble, confusion and evil in the world would presently be swept away and replaced by glory and honour and blessing and power. And when they saw that this was the meaning of the vision, they would “run” to tell their despondent neighbours. It would give them an energy of life in place of a feeling that life was not worth living. Now they would have a purpose – to make known Him whom God had foretold.

Let us take that to heart. God has written the vision of the coming of His Christ in plain characters, so that all may read it if they will. And those who do read and believe may take to themselves wings in the errand of mercy and encouragement to those around them. It is not for us to be concerned with the plans of the men of the world. They are bound to miscarry, because everybody who leaves God out of his calculations makes a mistake and plunges himself into confusion and shame. You do that – I do that. How much more those who do not know God at all! No, our hope is centred entirely upon Christ, and the whole Scriptures unite in the happy assurance that Christ is coming, and that His object is not merely to take a handful of people out of this world for Himself, but eventually to put the

whole world on a righteous and blessed basis! Even when we know that “the Chaldeans” are coming round the corner to do their mischief, it will only be “for a little while”. It will be *all right* presently!

“For the vision is yet for an appointed time” (2:3). The hour is fixed. The Father has put the times and the seasons in His own power, “but at the end it shall speak and not lie; though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.”

Then Habakkuk refers again to his bafflement about the unrighteousness of the instrument of judgment whom God is using. “Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him” (v.4). The pride of Babylon is well known; we find it depicted in the book of Daniel. The essence of pride is that it excludes God from its calculations. It magnifies the first personal pronoun, and forgets God altogether (cp Isaiah 47:7-8). It comes before destruction as a haughty spirit before a fall (Proverbs 16:18). So Nebuchadnezzar had to be toppled from the eminence to which he had exalted himself, and eat grass like the beasts (Daniel 4:30-32).

Habakkuk’s faith

But Jehovah has an answer to Habakkuk’s problem. “The just shall live by his faith” (2:4). These “golden words” are quoted three times in the New Testament, each for a different purpose, each placing emphasis on a different part of the sentence. In the

epistle to the *Romans* (1:17) the Holy Spirit uses the text to show how men become *just* (“righteous”) before God – by faith. He uses it in *Galatians* (3:11) to show that this righteousness comes *by faith* – not by law-works. And He uses it in the epistle to the *Hebrews* (10:38) to show that “the just” don’t merely start their lives with faith, and then put it away as though they had no more use for it. They *live by faith*. Faith is what characterises “the just” throughout all their lives here, the faith that lays hold of God, that makes substantial and real the things are beyond our natural sight (Hebrews 11:1). [By this faith “the just” would endure through the Babylonian oppression, “as seeing Him who is invisible”.]

I wish we all knew the value of *faith* in the things of life. We are so readily deceived by the evil one into thinking that faith is something to use when we are at an extremity – rather like a lifebelt – to be used when we struggle in the water but to be abandoned when our feet stand on firm ground. But the just shall *live* by faith. Faith is as true of the “just” man when he is asleep as when he is awake. It is a trust in God, a *conscious trust*, in the sense that we are as conscious of the supporting arms of God beneath us as a baby is of the strength and love of its mother’s arms. The baby knows it, feels it, and is restful because of it. Just so is faith with the believer. It gives us consciousness that we are in the arms of the everlasting God. He is our God and Father – *my*

Father; and the Saviour is *my* Lord – just as Habakkuk said, on receipt of the awful news of God’s soon-coming judgment on Judah, “O Lord, my God, mine Holy One. We shall not die” (1:12). I feel it, I know it, in sickness and in health, in every kind of difficulty. It is faith that keeps me in living touch with Him. “Without faith it is *impossible* to please him” (Hebrews 11:6). Do your good works, preach the Gospel, write your articles, do whatever you think in the service of God. Whatever you do, you will never exceed what is due to God from you; but without faith it is impossible to please Him. You may do the greater things that are in the public eye in faith, because you feel that you must have His helpful hand; but in the humdrum of life you may feel that you do not need God’s hand. But we find the true conception of the matter right back in the prophet Habakkuk. God said to this trembling man, fearful of what was coming from Babylon, “The just shall live by faith”. Those who are righteous before God believe Him. You cannot be righteous otherwise – how could you be? You know it is wrong and evil to distrust God. Satan said to Eve, in effect, “God is keeping something back from you. He won’t let you eat of that tree” – and Eve didn’t trust God. She should have believed God and disbelieved Satan. [And so must we.]

Oh, that we might lay hold of the grand truth of this text – “The just shall live by faith”!

Spiritual diagnostics for the local congregation

The challenge of the letters to the churches in Asia

Yannick Ford

The Lord was “in the midst of the lampstands” (Revelation 1:13) with “eyes like a flame of fire”, piercing every pretence to diagnose the real condition of the seven local churches to which He wrote the letters penned by John. This article distils lessons from five of these letters. We too should read it, not abstractly, but with our own congregation in mind, and our personal part in it!

Introduction

I have often been struck with Revelation chapters 2-3. They record the words of the Lord Jesus Himself to us in our current dispensation.

There are a number of ways of looking at the addresses to the seven churches. We can see in them a prophetic history of the church, but we can also see, as it were, a complete spectrum of possible states of a local church. Most importantly, we can learn what the Lord sees and what He has to say about it. It is this approach that I take. These letters show us *what is important to the Lord*, as Head of the Assembly. For each church we read the words, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (e.g. 2:7, NKJV). This is an important call for our attention. In this day of “multiple voices”, and of a huge amount of background distraction aiming to fill our minds, I believe that the Lord, through the Holy Spirit, does have a word for us in our local assemblies. Our exercise should be to discern that word, and we can find it by our study of the Word of God.

Two important points to start with.

- Revelation is principally a book of *judgment*. We read of the judgments of God, and how God will control and direct events so that His chosen King, the Lord Jesus, will reign over this world. In chapters 1-3 we do not see the Lord Jesus judging the world yet, but we see Him acting as Judge over the churches – see 1 Peter 4:17 for the same principle. He is walking in the midst of the seven lampstands (1:13) and discerning what their state is. This means that we now have a golden opportunity to prepare for the judgment seat of Christ. The world talks about “making hay while the sun shines”, but we want to make “gold, silver and precious stones” while the sun shines, rather than hay, wood or stubble (1 Corinthians 3:12). We will be able to do this if we carefully consider what the Lord has to say in these letters to the churches.

- The letters are addressed to the *angels* of the churches. The word *angel* could mean *messenger*, or it might mean *representative* – see for example Matthew 18:10, and perhaps Acts 12:15. I tend to think it suggests a representative. The best explanation I have seen is by T.B. Baines (p.21): “The word ‘angel’ carries the idea of representation, and seems to be here used figuratively to describe *those who are responsible, from their gift or influence, for the condition of the Church*” (emphasis mine). If this is a correct interpretation, it places considerable responsibility on the “angels”, but they are upheld by the Lord, in His hands – see Revelation 1: 16 & 20.

Ephesus

The Lord introduces Himself as the Judge, walking in the midst of the seven lamp stands (Revelation 2:1), and upholding the angels. It is therefore *His verdict that counts*. It is what *He* has to say that we want to hear – the opinions of others are but a distraction.

When we look at Ephesus, what do we see? We see *works*, i.e. service, patience and endurance, separation from evil, discrimination, and a holy walk (2:2,3). However *love* is missing (2:4), and this was the first priority for the Lord. A husband and wife, or parents and children, for instance, would not look primarily for service from each other, but rather for love (although love will express itself in service). It is easy to forget the great love that the Lord has for us, and that He desires to see a response.

Why are the Nicolaitans mentioned at the end of the letter (2:6), after the comment on the Ephesians losing their first love? Perhaps it is because hating what the Lord hates is an evidence of love for Him. It is not clear exactly who the Nicolaitans were, but their practices evidently were a particular insult to God and His grace, and the Ephesians hated this. This is an evidence of *feeling what the Lord felt*, which the Lord approved of.

The overcomer (2:7) is *presumably one who seeks to recover his or her first love*. The overcomer is promised to eat from the tree of life, in the paradise of God. Perhaps this could mean that the overcomer, rather than seeking to make a paradise down here, will be “seeking those things that are above” (T.B. Baines).

*When we look at Ephesus, what do we see?
We see works.
However love is missing.*

Pergamum

The Lord presents Himself to this church as having a sharp, two-edged sword (2:12), which we believe from Hebrews 4:12 to be the Word of God. The Word of God is able to *discriminate* and to *discern* – and these abilities were what the church at Pergamum was lacking.

The Lord's commendation is that He knows where they are dwelling (Revelation 2:13), and its particular difficulty – the throne of Satan. This could either refer to their “dwelling” in the world in general, which is under Satan (1 John 5:19); or it could mean that some places are specific bases of Satan's operations. G. Campbell Morgan suggested that Satan does have specific bases, as well as having his agents everywhere. He thinks that Satan's bases are probably places of worldly power and privilege, where he can best use his influence. In Luke 4:5-8 we can see that Satan's temptation consisted in making the *glories* of the kingdoms pass by, i.e., their power and privilege. Whether Pergamum was a specific “base” of Satan's operations is hard to be sure today, but there was evidently a great danger to the believers, that the Lord recognized.

I believe that these points have an important word for us. Some commentators take, “I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is”, as a criticism, i.e., that the church had settled down in the world. I think from the context that it may rather be a commendation – *the Lord was recognizing the place of peril that they were in.*

We are in a place of peril, because we are in a place of worldly power and privilege. The world would like to offer us its patronage. The Lord knows our difficulties. Let us be encouraged and strengthened by this!

- What was good about the church in Pergamum? They *held fast His name, and did not deny His faith* (Revelation 2:13). They considered the Lord as the “author and finisher of faith” (Hebrews 12:2); they believed in Him as He revealed Himself, and trusted in His work, even when Antipas (whose name means “against all”) was slain. Today it is difficult to live by the Bible, as such a lifestyle may well be thought of as intolerant, opposed to a multi-faith world view, and not in step with science and economics. To live by the Bible will appear to be going in the opposite direction to the world – the direction in which Antipas went – and it isn't easy.
- What was bad about the church in Pergamum? They *tolerated men holding and teaching false doctrines*. These doctrines were those of Balaam, and of the Nicolaitans (Revelation 2:14,15). For Balaam, see Numbers 25:1-2, and Numbers 31:16. He couldn't curse the people of Israel, so he encouraged them to sin, knowing that this would bring God's judgment on them. So, for

Pergamum, the doctrine of Balaam would be, “It’s OK to do bad things if you are a Christian – it’s OK to eat of idol sacrifices and to commit fornication”. And yet these were the very things forbidden at the Jerusalem council – see Acts 15: 28-29.

Some have thought that the name “Nicolaitan” means “conqueror of the people”, and have therefore considered their doctrine to have been the beginning of the clerical system. But more likely they were people like Balaam, who, though prevented from doing open evil (just as Balaam could not curse Israel), brought their evil practices in by the back door. We shouldn’t tolerate such things! It isn’t fashionable to be intolerant, though – we will be an “Antipas”.

The overcomer – the one who does not tolerate such evil teaching and their teachers – will receive the hidden manna and the white stone. “Hidden manna” probably refers to the manna hidden from view in a golden pot in the ark of the covenant – see Hebrews 9:4. We generally think of the manna as a picture of Christ. Therefore the hidden manna is probably a picture of what God appreciated in Christ – God’s hidden treasure, so to speak. So for overcomers to receive the hidden manna may signify that they treasure and delight in what God delights in, and in so doing become more like Christ. The white stone may have signified approval of the person to whom it was given. In the same way, God takes note of us *personally*. He loves to commend what is good in us.

Sardis

This is one of the saddest letters, and one that has often been in my mind. The Lord presents Himself as the one with the seven spirits (Revelation 3:1), and this letter has much to do with *the absence of* the power of the Holy Spirit. As such, it is very important to us. The Spirit is the One who brings life, but the church at Sardis only had a name that lived, whereas *they* were dead.

Note that the deadness refers to the general company of professing Christians, *not* true believers (who may well, however, have been *asleep*). A true believer can never be lost – see John 10:27-29 – but at Sardis there may well have been a mixture of true and false – some nominal believers mixed with the true.

The works at Sardis were not perfect – that is, they were unfulfilled (3:2). There was no energy or action of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit lives in true believers *personally* (see 1 Corinthians 6:19) and also *in the assembly* (see 1 Corinthians 3:16). As we can see from 1 Corinthians 12, it is the Holy Spirit who directs service in the church. But we can both *quench* and *grieve* Him. Only what is from the Holy Spirit will be valuable; anything from the flesh and man’s ideas is worthless – see John 6:63.

We can *grieve* the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:30) by our wrong attitudes and by the works of the flesh – bitterness, wrath, evil speaking, etc. If the Holy Spirit is grieved, we cannot count on His power and blessing for service. We can also *quench* the Holy Spirit – see 1 Thessalonians 5:19. We may do this by making our own arrangements, orders, structures and plans etc, not allowing liberty for the Holy Spirit to act and use us as He pleases.

How should we act in the light of this? Revelation 3:2 gives the answer – to strengthen these unfulfilled works, by allowing the Holy Spirit to operate – let us be diligent to ensure that we are not grieving or quenching Him.

Philadelphia

Whereas the Lord introduces Himself to other churches in terms of what He has, or what He does, to Philadelphia he writes, uniquely, of His own character – “He who is holy, He who is true” (3:7). One gets the impression that the believers at Philadelphia had much affection for the Lord, and that they understood His character, and tried to be like Him.

The Lord also presents Himself as the One with supreme administrative authority – He “opens and no-one shuts, and shuts and no-one opens”. Although the Lord is not yet revealed as supreme ruler, and the unbelieving man or woman lives as if He was of no concern to them, yet He retains His administrative authority – if He opens, no one can shut. We can therefore trust Him for the opportunities that *He* wants.

The Philadelphians only had a little strength. The works may not have seemed great to other observers, and the comments in verse 9 seem to suggest that the Philadelphians were despised. However, BECAUSE of their suitable moral state – they had kept the Lord’s word and not denied His name – He therefore had opened a door for them, and this door would be kept open by His power.

This is a real encouragement to us, especially if we feel weak or insignificant. As long as we seek to be “holy and true”, and really love the Lord and His word, then I believe that we can seek an open door such as the Philadelphians had.

*As long as we seek to be “holy and true”,
and really love the Lord and His word,
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The Lord further encourages the Philadelphians by speaking of His coming, and His reward. They were to keep going because there was a crown that could be won, if they did not give up. And the Lord would make of them a pillar in the heavenly temple. A pillar is a picture of strength and stability, and this contrasts with the weak state and “little strength” of Philadelphia. By speaking of His coming (v 11) and of the future blessing in heaven (v 12), the Lord is directing their view and their hopes to heaven, where He is. This would help the Philadelphians to weigh things according to God’s viewpoint, and so not be discouraged.

Laodicea

The Lord introduces Himself as “the Amen” (3:14 – cp. 2 Corinthians 1:20), and as the faithful and true witness – and that was what the church in Laodicea should have been. The Laodiceans were lukewarm – i.e. indifferent to Christ. There was a profession (they had “works” – 3:15), but no attachment to Christ. There was self-occupation, self-sufficiency, and self-complacency. Compare John 15:5, Philippians 3:3, Philippians 4:13. They are advised to buy gold, white garments and eye salve.

Gold denotes divine righteousness. All the items in the holy place of the tabernacle and of the temple were of gold, or overlaid with gold. “White garments” indicates practical righteousness. Eye salve – to see properly; to see things as they really are – i.e., in God’s estimation. The Laodiceans were to *buy* these things – see Isaiah 55:1 – to buy without money or price. These things that the Lord wants us to buy do not cost us money or our own efforts or good deeds. Nevertheless there is a *transaction*. We *buy* something because we either *need* it or *want* it – the Laodiceans needed these things, and the Lord wanted them to *feel* their need of them. The transaction was that they would need to exchange them for their self-complacent attitude. Thus the idea of *buying* makes us think of spiritual exercise.

The Lord loves us, and calls us to be zealous in repentance (3:19). How do we do this? By *listening out for His voice* (3:20). Song of Songs chapter 5 is very relevant to this matter.

Bibliography and acknowledgments

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The Son of Man

David Anderson

“Who is this Son of Man?” (John 12:34) Fifteen months ago, in an uplifting article on Psalm 8, Yannick Ford focussed on Christ as the Second Man who “overwrote” our failed history as men in Adam. This instructive new article throws much light on the slightly enigmatic title, “Son of Man”, by surveying the New Testament references to it and to Psalm 8. This shows how JEHOVAH, by being made truly Man, and dying, rising and ascending, set His own glory above the heavens.

Introduction

A modern playwright said his intention in writing a drama entitled “Son of man” was to bring out the real meaning behind the Gospels’ accounts of Jesus Christ. However, the play was written entirely from his own human viewpoint! To find out the truth about the name, or title, “Son of Man”, we must study Psalm 8 in the light of the New Testament. David asks (v.4), “What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him?” (NKJV). It’s a question about the special nature and character of man – why does man mean so much to God? To paraphrase, “Why should an all-powerful God be mindful of [lit. “remember”, “be compassionate for”] mortal man; why should He visit [lit. “care for”, “attend to”] man even in all his dignity, seeing that He is so great?”¹

Adam – from the hand of God

As a shepherd David must have spent his night watches contemplating the moon and the stellar heavens with their

galaxies. He looked up (v.3) and saw their vastness (how bad that nowadays there is, so we read, too much light pollution in most of Britain to see what David saw, even through telescopes!). Looking around (vv. 6,7), and down, as well as up (v.8), David reflected on the majesty and glory of God in creation, and recognised it to be all the work of Jehovah’s fingers (v.3). In astonishment, he states that man is not an insignificant, unnoticed speck in the vastness of the universe, but rather the crowning act of God’s creation! In vv.5-8 he elaborates the complete answer to the question he asked in v.4. Yes, Adam was made in God’s image. He is God’s representative – man with all his potential; man in all his dignity, dominion and destiny (Genesis 1:26-31). A man who “was made a little lower than God” (ESV margin and Amplified version) is the literal Hebrew of Psalm 8:5. Sadly Adam fell into sin and forfeited his unique position!

¹ In v.4 the first “man” translates the Hebrew *enosh* (man in his frailty), whilst “son of man” is “son of Adam”, speaking of man in his dignity.



Creationists have correctly emphasised the “anthropic principle”. This is the scientific evidence that the whole universe is precisely designed and operated to support life and, uniquely, mankind; and it is evidence that God made it for Adam and Eve. However, Scripture emphasises that the universe exists primarily for the *last Adam*, or the *second Man*, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Man in whom there is no failure. Romans 5:14 asserts that Adam “was a type of Him who was to come”. So, to make the link between “Son of man” and Christ, we must consider the whole of Scripture, not just Genesis 1; only then can we fully answer David’s question, “What is man?”

“The first man Adam became a living being. The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual. The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven“ (1 Corinthians 15:45-47).

Fallen Man

Old Testament writers seem perplexed about the character of man. Job poses the same question as David. He asked if man could ever be right with God, especially as he noticed that all were continually scrutinised by God (Job 15:14, 25:6 & 7:17-18). David again asked, “What is man?” in Psalm 144:3-4, because he recognised that all are under judgement; they are both mockers and opposers of God and the godly.

*David and Job just
saw mankind in all
its puny frailty*

David and Job just saw mankind in all its puny frailty: the “man” they considered was only feeble, mortal man, only *enosh*!²

In reality, the answer to “What is man?” awaited the advent of Christ.

Jesus Christ, the Son of Man on earth

The Lord quoted the Septuagint version of Psalm 8:2 to justify the children praising Him in the temple precincts. “Out of the mouth of babes

*In reality, the answer to
“What is man?” awaited
the advent of Christ*

² See note 1.

Godly Jews, understanding the Hebrew idiom, would appreciate that “Son of Man” meant that Jesus Christ was truly a Man

and nursing infants You have perfected praise” (Matthew 21:16). More importantly, He frequently claimed the title “Son of Man” for Himself – in 78 out of 82 occurrences of “Son of Man” in the Gospels (from my computer search).

Godly Jews, understanding the Hebrew idiom, would appreciate that “Son of Man” meant that Jesus Christ was truly a Man in every sense of the word. (In Hebrew “son of ...” implies “having the character of...”) Luke’s Gospel highlights our Lord’s *Manhood*: and his genealogy of Him shows His descent (“as was supposed”) from both *Enosh* [mortal man], and *Adam* [man made by the finger of God] (Luke 3:23, 38). But we must hasten to add that with Jesus there were none of those defects that Job and David had identified in mankind. Christ was a Man totally without, and apart from, sin (Hebrews 4:15; 1 John 3:5).

Almost one-third of the Lord’s references to Himself as the “Son of Man” focus on the closing events of His life:

His rejection, humiliation, sufferings, and death. He became Man in order to die, and when He spoke about Himself as “Son of Man” He was effectively committing Himself to the pathway of the cross. “And He began to teach [the disciples] that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again” (Mark 8:31). Like those disciples, we must allow these words to sink into our ears and hearts (Luke 9:44), for His death is life for us (John 6:53).

Almost one-third of the Lord’s references to Himself as the “Son of Man” focus on the closing events of His life

Another one-third of the Lord’s references to Himself as the Son of Man relate to His second coming. For example, “In those days... [everyone] will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory” (Mark 13:24-26). At His trial, the Lord

Another one-third of the Lord’s references to Himself as the Son of Man relate to His second coming



warned the high priest, “I am [the Christ, the Son of the Blessed] and you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven” (Mark 14:62). Caiaphas *did* see Him – through Stephen, when the latter exclaimed to the Sanhedrin, “Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!” (Acts 7:56) “Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen” (Revelation 1:7, ESV). God also has given Him authority to judge, because He is the Son of Man (John 5:27).

Christ Jesus, the exalted Son of Man

But already at this present time Jesus is at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven. Psalm 8:6 (“You

have put all things under his feet”) is used three times in the New Testament epistles to substantiate several truths of Christianity in which the supremacy and dominion of the Son of Man are of paramount importance.

First of all, Hebrews 2:5-10 quotes and explains Psalm 8:4-6. The Son of God became the Son of Man in order to suffer death for everything (Hebrews 2:9, Darby Trans.). Whilst, at present, not everything is in subjection to Him, we do see Him at God’s right hand (cp. Psalm 110:1, also Hebrews 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2). There He is “crowned with glory and honour” (2:9), with the writer of Hebrews alluding to the Septuagint version of Exodus 28:2 regarding Aaron’s “garments of glory and beauty”. Hebrews thereby answers the Psalmist’s question (NKJV), “What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him?” by showing that God’s care for man is found for believers in the high priestly grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Secondly, Psalm 8:6 is quoted in Ephesians 1: 22 – “... he put all things under his feet.” This occurs in the context of vv.20-23, in which Paul enumerates five things that God the Father has done in relation to The Christ. Using the aorist, the tense which shows that these things have already been completed, Paul asserts that:

- » God worked in the [dead] Christ and
- » He raised Him from among the dead.
- » He seated Him at His own right hand in heavenly places.
- » He put all things under His feet – Lordship.
- » He gave Him to be head over all things to the church – Headship, especially in the sense of the “chief”.

Here we see a meaning in Psalm 8:6 that could not be revealed until the ascension of Christ! Ephesians 1:9-10 expands upon Psalm 8:1, and states that all things on earth and in heaven will be headed up in The Christ. This is the “secret of God’s will”! Everyone in those times will see Him, and He will be “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named... but also in [that age] to come” (Ephesians 1:21, ESV).

Thirdly, Psalm 8:6 is also quoted in 1 Corinthians 15:27, in a section (vv.20-28) which describes the unstoppable march of resurrection in its chronological sequence from Christ’s own resurrection to the end of time and into eternity. Verses 20-23 say that Christ as Man is the Guarantor that everyone belonging to Him (all who are “in Christ”) will be raised to life immortal. He is the Victor over death itself (v.26)! Once again, the victory-song of Psalm 8:6 is quoted in v.27. The “all things” of the quotation were already detailed in vv.24-25 – “all rule”,

“all authority”, “all power”, and “all enemies”.

Vv.45-49 powerfully make, both by similarity and contrast, the link between Adam and Christ that is essential to the interpretation of Psalm 8:

- » the first Adam and the last Adam
- » the natural and the spiritual
- » the first man and the second Man
- » the man of dust and the heavenly Man
- » we have borne the image of the man of dust; we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man.

Whereas none of the epistles uses the actual title/name of “Son of Man” (except by quotation in Hebrews 2:6), it occurs again in Revelation where prophetic issues and future judgements resurface. Christ is first symbolically seen in this book in the midst of the seven lampstands [i.e. amongst the seven churches in Asia] as “One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band” (Revelation 1:13, NKJV). This reminds us of Peter’s admonition, “For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?” (1 Peter 4:17). The end of the disobedient is described in Revelation 14:14-20 when the Son of Man executes judgements upon the earth. Of the Son of Man Daniel says, “To him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and

languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed.”

The universal reign of the Son of Man

The three allusions to Psalm 8 in the epistles tell us that the Psalm celebrates the universal reign of the Son of Man, God's True Representative, as set over all the works of God's hand and ruling the whole creation. This is the prophetic objective of the whole book of Psalms. If we regard Psalms 1-8 as an overall introduction to the Psalms, then Psalm 2 introduces the Messiah established in Zion in the last times of world-wide opposition to God (also echoed in Psalm 8:2, “because of your enemies”) and emphasises Christ's royalty as the anointed King. Psalm 8 exults in the majesty and supremacy of His universal kingdom. Notice that v.9 repeats v.1: “O LORD, our Lord, How excellent is Your name in all the earth!” But in v.1, the scope of Jehovah's majesty [so, Darby Trans.] extends both “throughout all the earth” and “above the heavens” (cp Hebrews 2:5-10, Ephesians 1:20-23 and 1 Corinthians 15:20-28 above). David was meditating upon the majestic Name and glory of Jehovah, the Name that describes who He is – the great I AM! But Jesus is Jehovah the Saviour (Matthew 1:21), whom God has made both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36). Israel's hope, and God's plan for mankind, will be fulfilled

in the millennial reign of the Lord Jesus Christ over the entire universe. When He sits in majestic glory and reigns over all the earth as the Son of Man, all David's desires are fulfilled – and he worships!

1 Corinthians 15:27 states that only God is excepted from Christ's supremacy during His Millennial reign. The kingdom is consummated when all things are brought into subjection to Him, and death, man's last enemy, is destroyed (v.26). Though in Godhead co-equal with the Father, the Son of God then subjects Himself as Son of Man to God the Father for all eternity; and the eternal state, in which “God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) is all in all”, comes to pass (v.28).

LORD what is man? 'Tis He who died
And all Thy nature glorified,
Thy righteousness and grace displayed
When He for sin atonement made,
Obedient unto death, was slain—
Worthy is He o'er all to reign.

Thy counsels ere the world began
All centred in the Son of Man,
Him destined to the highest place,
Head of His church through sovereign grace.
To Him, enthroned in Majesty,
Let every creature bend the knee.

Worthy, O Son of Man, art Thou,
Of every crown that decks Thy brow;
Worthy art Thou to be adored
And owned as universal Lord;
Oh, hasten that long promised day
When all shall own Thy rightful sway!

J G Deck

The ministry of the Spirit

2 Corinthians 3

Theo Balderston

What a lovely, uplifting, and powerful thought – that the ministry that has saved us and takes us up to glory is a ministry of the Spirit!

Introduction

What is “the ministry of the Spirit”? Paul introduced the subject in 2 Corinthians 3 because apostolic authority, and in particular his personal apostolic authority, were being undermined in Corinth. Though, of all people, the Corinthians had least ground to doubt Paul. They had been saved by Paul’s preaching! To doubt his authenticity was to doubt their own salvation (v. 2¹; Acts 18:10)!

And the transforming effect of his preaching on the Corinthians displayed the true character of his ministry. It had been like a letter from Christ written on their heart in the Spirit of the living God (v.3)! And what was *in* this letter? *Christ!* He was the Content as well as the Author! This is what the last verse of 2 Corinthians 3 states. “The Lord the Spirit” works a transforming effect on believers’ characters through their consciousness of Christ in glory. This is the summing-up of “the ministry of the Spirit”. Although the mention of “writing on the heart” and of “the new covenant” (vv.2, 6) allude to Jeremiah 31:33, where the Law is to be written on the hearts of the restored Israel and Judah in time to come, Paul pointedly does *not* make the Law the content of the Spirit’s writing on the Corinthians’ hearts. The people who “read” the lives of these Corinthians were not directed towards the Law; but to Christ. It was these writing-materials (the Spirit, and the heart), not what was written, that gave it a “new-covenant” character. It was a ministry, “not of the letter [meaning, letter of the alphabet written on a stone tablet], but of the Spirit”. (See further note at end.)

The transforming effect of his preaching had been like a letter from Christ written on their heart in the Spirit.

And what was in this letter? Christ!

“The letter kills”

The Law was the covenant “of the letter”. In the covenant of Law, humanity, meaning man-in-Adam, was under an examination by proxy, which the proxy

¹ Where the reference is given to the verse only, it is to 2 Corinthians 3.

(Israel) failed (cp. Romans 3:19). In Genesis 11 humanity magnified itself against God who had so recently delivered it from the Flood. But God responded to this second spurning of His grace by more grace. He called Abraham out of Ur, then Haran, for *blessing*. He would make a nation out of Abraham, and in turn bless that nation so that the nations of the earth might be blessed (Genesis 12:2-3; 22:17-18; Psalm 67). What a chain of blessing! But before the nation that would spring from him could be blessed, it has to learn through bitter and prolonged experience that it deserves no blessing, only judgment. This is what the killing power of the Law teaches. The length and difficulty of the lesson correspond to the reluctance of the self-righteous human heart to learn it.

Abraham's *faith* had been reckoned to him as righteousness (Genesis 15:6), and the promises made to him were unconditional. But at Sinai these promises regarding Israel received the temporary modification, so to speak, of a Law which took them off the ground of "justification by faith alone", and prescribed, "Do, and live" (Leviticus 18:5; Deuteronomy 4:1; 6:25; 8:1; Ezekiel 20:11, 21). In spite of the lesson of the great failings of their forefathers (e.g. Genesis 38), twice Israel glibly accepted the demands of the Law, once even before they had heard it, and once after (Exodus 19:8; 24:3). They then immediately proceeded to transgress it by worshipping the golden calf (Exodus 32:1ff). Yet, despite their recidivist failure to observe it, they repeated their undertaking throughout their history (e.g. Joshua 24:18-24; Nehemiah 10:29). The Law was spiritual, but they were carnal, sold under sin (cp. Romans 7:14). Of course, there were regenerate individuals, born of the Spirit, who experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit, as is shown by David's penitent plea, "Do not take your Holy Spirit from me" (Psalm 51:11). Yet not even they were actually *indwelt* by the Holy Spirit, according to the Lord's word to his disciples concerning this, "He dwells with you [present tense] and shall be in you [future tense]" (John 14:17). And, these individuals apart, for the nation of Israel as a whole the experience of being under the Law was one of trying to obey it in the power of the flesh. As a result, disobedience to the Law of God was the mode of Israel's existence (Acts 7:53). "Sin" used the Law to incite disobedience and to kill, so that the commandment which promised life was found to bring death (cp. Romans 7:10-11).

Twice Israel glibly accepted the demands of the Law, once even before they had heard it, and once after. They then immediately proceeded to transgress it.

“The ministry of righteousness”

“But the Spirit gives life”. Between verses 7 and 16 Paul sets off on a little digression designed to throw into relief the superlative glory of “the ministry of the Spirit” by reminding his readers of the glory of the Law! Many of them had been synagogue-attenders (Acts 18:4ff), and would need little reminding. But the glory of the ministry of the Spirit was far, far greater. It is a “ministry of righteousness”, whereas the Law was a ministry of condemnation (vv.7-9). And it is permanent, whereas the Law was passing (vv. 11-16).

The Law was not a ministry of righteousness, but a “ministry of death” and “of condemnation” (vv.7,9). Paul never disparages the glory of the Law. It was more than Israel could tolerate when they saw it reflected in Moses’ face. There they beheld a reflection of the glory of *the LORD* as Moses had witnessed it on his second ascent of Sinai; and this was simultaneously the glory of *the Law*, because on that occasion the LORD had repeated it in brief (Exodus 34:4-28). Nevertheless, this intolerable glory was less glorious than the ministry of the Spirit (v.8), because a ministry of death and condemnation could not truly reveal “the living God”. This was what the “ministry of righteousness” did.

“Condemnation” and “righteousness” are words that the unbeliever might consider rough equivalents. Paul by the Spirit treats them as opposites. Though condemnation upholds the holiness of God, it neither shows God at His *most* holy, nor makes the sinner righteous. But in the cross God showed Himself at His *most holy* in visiting all the judgment and pain required by sin upon His own beloved, sinless Son. Condemning us as well as His own Son would not show God any holier, just as adding five to infinity would not increase infinity. Calling us righteous displays His own righteousness, because it acknowledges the worth of the perfect sacrifice of His Son. God freely calls us righteous on the sole ground that we too honour His Son by believing on Him. But “he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:18). Thus the righteousness of God is a righteousness that *confers* righteousness and life, and not condemnation. This is its greatness. It is a righteousness “apart from the law”; the Old Testament could only bear witness to it (Romans 3:21). “I will make mention of your righteousness, of yours only” (Psalm 71:16; cp. Psalm 145:7). Hallelujah! Thus Paul employed the glory

A ministry of death and condemnation could not truly reveal “the living God”. This was what the “ministry of righteousness” did.

of the Law as a benchmark for measuring a glory that excels it (v.10) – that shows God to be yet more glorious than the Law ever could.

Permanent, not Passing

And, glorious as the ministry of the Law was, it was temporary (2 Corinthians 3:11-13). Paul simply assumes that his readers accept this. That dispensation had done its work. But the marvellous ministry committed to the apostles could and would never be replaced by a greater. Therefore, Paul's ministry could be without reserve; he used great "boldness" (or, "frankness") of speech (v.12). His ministry revealed "the glory of Christ who is the image of God" (4:4).

By contrast Moses had not shown Israel even as much of the glory of God as had been revealed to him; he had veiled his face (v.13). In point of fact Moses veiled his face after he had finished speaking, and kept it veiled till he again "went in to the Lord" (Exodus 34:33-4). Paul seems to interpret this action in terms of what Moses did not say. Clear as Moses' words were, there was a glory beyond what he spoke that he remained silent about. The unmentioned glory would have alerted Israel to "the end of what was passing away". The result was that, though the Old Testament speaks plainly concerning the coming and even the work of Messiah, it does not speak of the end of the Age of Law.

In v. 14 a concurrent reason is given for Israel not recognising this impermanence: "Their minds were hardened" (RV). Here Paul is writing about a veil on Israel's thoughts, not on Moses' face (v.15; cp. Ezekiel 11:19 // 36:26). But a time will come when Israel shall turn in heart to the Lord (v.16); and then they will see that the dispensation in which they had boasted only condemned them, and was ended in Christ (cp. Romans 10:3-4).²

The transforming work of the Spirit

Verse 17 begins with the perplexing words, "The Lord is the Spirit". Space prevents discussion of their meaning, but the flow of Paul's thought can be pursued without it. The verse also resumes the thread interrupted at v.7. Leaving the subject of Israel to come, Paul abruptly shifts the focus with "But we all" (v.18). This means both "*we* all", that is, "*we now* by contrast with Israel in time to come"; and "*we all*", that is, "all of us Christians", not just the apostles, who were the "*we*" of 2:14 - 3:6. "We all, beholding the glory of the Lord..." This is the

Our liberty is certainly not the liberty the world thinks of, namely, to do as we please

² Verbal parallels in the Septuagint show this: see Deuteronomy 4:30; 30:2; 1 Samuel 7:3; 2 Chronicles 30:9; Hosea 6:1; 14:1,2; further, Zechariah 1:3, etc. Isaiah 19:22; 55:7 are exceptions. And the natural subject of [lit.] "when it have turned", is "their heart" (v.15).

“liberty” that exists for us where the Spirit of the Lord is (v.17). Our liberty is certainly *not* the liberty the world thinks of, namely, to do as we please. *The Christian is saved and liberated into willing obedience to Christ and His word* (Romans 6:15-19; John 14:15).

Comparison of Paul’s use of the word “glory” leaves no doubt that here he means that we behold His heavenly, ascended glory. It is the privilege of the Christian now to be aware by faith of this glory;

and this is the great division between the Christian and the unbeliever. This is an obvious but vital point. The world’s mind is devoid of the light of Christ glorified. But *every real Christian* has an inward sense of Christ risen, living, and glorified.

*May we not simply
be aware of, but
behold that glory
the more clearly!*

Of course the cross is the fundamental divide between believer and unbeliever (Galatians 6:14). Unlike the unbeliever, the believer views the cross from the perspective of the subsequent glory (Luke 24:26; 1 Peter 1:11).

The Holy Spirit imparts the liberty in which the believer sees the glory of the Lord (cp. John 16:14); and may we not simply be aware of, but behold that glory the more clearly! The Holy Spirit

also transforms the beholders into the image of Christ glorified – into “heavenly men and women” (2 Corinthians 3:18). This, not the writing of the Law, is His present work. Unlike the Law, it will lead us to look on the unseen, not the seen; to “regard no man after the flesh” but to be those to whom “all things are become new”; to be morally separate from the world; but also to carry about in the body “the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh” (4:10, 18; 5:16-17; 6:17). These are among the great – and sobering – effects of this transforming work.

Conclusion: the ministry of the Spirit

Paul’s great chapter ends, “Even as from [the] Lord [the] Spirit” [Darby Trans.]. This uniquely strong affirmation of the superlative greatness of the Holy Spirit sums up the emphasis of his chapter on “the ministry of the Spirit”. It echoes “the Lord is the Spirit” in v.17 and the two phrases enclose this final section where the ministry of the Holy Spirit *fills everything!*

How great is this ministry! It comes from a glorified Christ (John 7:39). Once God was supremely glorified in the cross and this had been registered in the

*Every real
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reception of the once-crucified Man at the pinnacle of glory (John 13:31-32), *He* became the measure of our perfect acceptance before God; and there was nothing any longer to prevent God the *Holy Spirit* from taking residence in sinners, even, whom God had so completely purged. And now, indwelling us, His great work is to glorify Christ to our hearts; there is no veil, no distance, between the believer and the Saviour, just as there is no veil between the Man Christ Jesus and God the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit writes Christ livingly on the heart of the believer, and others should see this. We only see the lamentable difference between ourselves and the picture painted of us here (so would the Corinthians!!). Transferring Paul's words to ourselves, "Who is sufficient for these things?" "No-one", is the answer as to our own sufficiency. But let us also transfer Paul's "our sufficiency is of God" to ourselves, and, more consciously and constantly looking on the Lord in glory, earnestly desire greater likeness to Him.

Further Note on v.6

(i) Paul did not write "the new covenant" (as sometimes mistranslated), as if his ministry exhausted the fulfilment of the new covenant. The absence of the definite article means that he used "new covenant" in an extended sense: his ministry had the character of the new covenant in that it, too, was a Spirit-and-heart ministry. But the new covenant in the strict sense is concluded with Israel to come (Hebrews 8:8; cp. Jeremiah 31:36), as 2 Corinthians 3:16 also implies. 1 Corinthians 11:25 seems to embrace both the extended and the strict sense, the latter, forward-looking sense leading to the explanatory "For" of v.26.

(ii) Did Paul in verse 6 mean "of the Spirit" (i.e., the Holy Spirit), or, "of the spirit" (small "s")? The terms of the new covenant in Jeremiah 31:31-34 do not mention the Holy Spirit, and eminent expositors have considered that Paul meant "spirit". There is not the space here to argue the matter, but this writer considers it unlikely that Paul used the word "S[s]pirit in two different senses in the same section of the verse; and, since only the Holy Spirit gives life, understands Paul to mean "of the Spirit".

*There is no veil, no distance,
between the believer and the Saviour,
just as there is no veil between
the Man Christ Jesus and God the Holy Spirit*

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“The things which are behind”

Leave behind earth's empty pleasure,
fleeting hope and changeful love;
leave its soon-corroding treasure;
there are better things above.

Leave, oh, leave thy fond aspirings,
bid thy restless heart be still;
cease, oh cease, thy vain desirings,
only seek thy Father's will.

Leave behind thy faithless sorrow,
and thine every anxious care;
He who only knows the morrow
can for thee its burden bear.

Leave behind the doubting spirit,
and thy crushing load of sin;
by thy mighty Saviour's merit,
life eternal thou shalt win.

Leave the darkness gathering o'er thee,
leave the shadow-land behind;
realms of glory lie before thee;
enter in, and welcome find.

Frances Ridley Havergal, *The Ministry of Song* [1870]