

## Acts - Commentaries by William John Hocking

The Institution of the Lord's Supper, Lord's Supper: 4. As Recorded in the Acts and Epistles, The Institution of the (20:6-7)

"THIS IS MY BODY"

"The same night in which He was betrayed, He took bread, and when He had given thanks, He brake it, and said, Take, eat, this is my body, which is broken for you. This do in remembrance of me."

I love that sentence, "This is my body." I know that the verse has been misinterpreted and abused to induce men and women to indulge in idolatrous practices. It is not implied that the bread becomes the body of Christ. The bread is bread continually. The Lord said, "This is my body." What did He mean? He was referring to Himself, and referring to Himself, as it seems to me, in all His absolute perfection and completeness. "This is my body," wholly, completely, and unreservedly given up in sacrifice to God for them and us. "This is my body"; think of Him, the blessed Lord, the Holy Christ that He was here in the days of His flesh, perfect man and perfect God, walking through this world filled with all the perfection it was possible for man to have and to exhibit. He came at last to the cross, to the altar, and laid Himself completely upon the altar, and His body, soul and spirit was offered up in sacrifice. He held nothing back. He was the complete burnt offering, ever acceptable and fragrant to Jehovah.

We know that it is our natural tendency to hold something back from the Master. It is a great day when through the grace of God a man comes to the point that he is able and is willing with his whole soul to give himself up to the Lord, as we are all enjoined to do in Romans 12, rendering spirit, soul and body to the Lord for His service and praise. People talk about consecration as a great event, and so it is, but in point of fact we are consecrated from the beginning of our spiritual history. We are the Lord's by purchase and by sanctification. We belong to Him entirely every part of us. But often there is the disposition to keep something in reserve for ourselves, to do something or other just in our own way. For instance, to give the Lord one day in the week, and perhaps use the other six for our own pleasure and purposes.

"This is my body. It is for you." The Lord has in this great renunciation set us an example. He has given everything for us. What have we given for Him? What have we done in return? When you look upon the cross, His body was there offered as a sacrifice for sins, for my sins, for your sins, for you. This is a wonderful word, of our Lord, beloved friends: "This is my body," and this body is for you! God had prepared that body for Him. It was a holy thing born into this world, never tainted with sin; and the Lord from first to last kept it in this world pure and unspotted, and when He came to the end of His ministry, He said, "This is my body. I have kept it so that it might be sacrificed for you. I am about to lay down my life. No man can take my life from me. I give it up for you." If such self-abnegation does not speak to a man's heart, what will? If this perfect sacrifice does not call out praise and worship, what will? We shall not learn any greater wonder than this in heaven. More fully, no doubt, we shall know it, but we begin to learn the great lesson of it here. We do so especially at the Lord's table. We come there, and the Lord tells us what He did for us at the cross. There are some present, perhaps, who have been several hundreds of times to the Lord's table, but if I were to appeal to any of them for their experience, I think they would say that they have every time learned something fresh, something they had not known quite in the same way before. Something has come with greater vividness than before. The Lord's Supper is always fresh and new and beautiful and joyous to those who realize the Lord's own words addressed to them, "This is my body, it is for you. This do in remembrance of me."

THE CUP AND THE COVENANT

"After the same manner, also He took the cup, when He had supped, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood." Thereby He brings before us the important truth that He offered Himself, and made an atonement for our sins. The cup is the new covenant in His blood. It is a frequent scriptural expression, the cup referring to what is in the cup. "This cup," that is, the wine, "is the new covenant in my blood." The special reference is to the covenant promised of old through Jeremiah which God will make with His repentant people, when their sins will be done away, and Jehovah will write His laws in their hearts.

"This cup is the new covenant in my blood," and when we come to these words we learn the ground upon which we can be at the Lord's table at all. The Lord in the midst is speaking to us, and we are enjoying His presence. He is telling us secret things about Himself and His sufferings; which are hidden from the world. Why is it that we are in such sacred nearness without fear and dread? Why is it we are not ashamed, and our eyes filled with tears because of our sins? The answer lies in the words, "This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you for the remission of your sins, that your sins might be removed, that you might be here with me, a blood-washed company, a part of that ransomed throng that will sound my praise through all eternity." Thus the deepest realities in the foundation of our spiritual lives are brought before us in this wonderful Supper.

FOR A REMEMBRANCE

"This cup is the new testament in my blood. This do in remembrance of me." The apostle reproaches them afresh by this repeated phrase. They had forgotten Him. There was the bread and the wine in which they shared, but they did not remember Him. The Lord was not before them. They thought of themselves, and of their own supper, and consequently, they did not eat the Lord's Supper. This is a fault to which we also are liable, beloved friends. You may think I am reiterating this warning unnecessarily about our danger, but if you will confer honestly with your own experience, you must admit the necessity for yourself, if not for others. We do require to be reminded of our weakness. Besides, let us remember also that there is a personage who tempts us to ignore this danger. Remember that Satan was at the passover supper, and that there he entered into the heart of Judas. And in our own case Satan would always distract our hearts and take away our thoughts if possible from the real object of our assembling, that is, the remembrance of the Lord in His death. The death of Christ was the

defeat, as it will be the ultimate destruction, of Satan. At Calvary he made his most stupendous effort against the One who came to destroy his works. He failed. But now he seeks to draw the hearts of the faithful away from the Lord Jesus, particularly those of the unwary on the occasion of the Lord's Supper. Oh, beloved friends, I think we shall do well to admit this weakness, and to remember that we may easily be tripped up if we are not watching, as our Lord enjoined us to do.

#### EATING UNWORTHILY

And now, we come to the latter part of this Scripture. We eat this bread and drink this cup to "show the Lord's death till He come." From the time of His betrayal until the time of His coming again, the observance of the Lord's Supper is to be maintained.

Then the apostle proceeded to speak a special word of reproof to the Corinthians who had so misbehaved themselves at the Lord's Supper. "Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup." Now we ought to recollect that in these words, the apostle wrote directly with reference to the manner in which the Corinthians had been eating the Lord's Supper. I say this because it is quite a common mistake to suppose that the apostle is speaking of the worthiness or otherwise of the persons at Corinth. But it is not so. If eating depended upon personal worthiness, where would worthy ones be found? Not on this globe surely. There are none worthy, no, not one. The very fact of the Lord by this memorial directing our attention to His body and His blood shows that we are not worthy. We are only worthy in the sense that He has taken us in our degraded condition, and that He has cleansed us by His precious blood, and thereby He has fitted us to be a kingdom of priests to God and His Father (Revelation 1:5, 6). In this manner He has given us peace of conscience, and the right to partake of the supper. But the right is the result of what He has done. It is what His work has procured for us, not our own personal fitness.

The apostle was not speaking of individual worthiness at all. here. He was speaking of the manner in which these saints conducted themselves when they were together. How did they conduct themselves? They acted with reprehensible carelessness. They ignored what the bread meant and what the wine meant. They forgot the solemn realities that were expressed by the emblems, and they partook of them as common, meaningless things. They missed, therefore, the whole purport of the Lord's Supper, and that was a serious lapse, as you will see, if you think of their conduct in the light of the solemn verses which precede.

Take yourself to task in this respect. Ask yourself in the day you come to the Lord's Supper, "What am I here for?" Because someone else comes? Because it is customary to attend? Is this, or something like it, your reason? Such are all very poor and insufficient reasons. The real cause of assembling is that the Lord has invited us to do so, and that He is present, and that in the bread and the wine He by the Spirit brings to our view His body which was given for us, and His blood which was shed for us. Having that purpose before us, we discern the Lord's body. It is not that we believe that the bread becomes the body of the Lord, or the wine His blood; such is the wicked opinion of some in Christendom. Nevertheless, it is the Lord's word that comes to us as we are participating. We hear Him speak, and the eyes of faith behold Him, and we are occupied with Him and He is talking to us of His decease, which He accomplished in His body at Jerusalem.

#### PREPARATION FOR THE LORD'S SUPPER

Do not let these words of the apostle keep anyone away from the Lord's Supper. It is an occasion for you to fulfill His desire, but also to think of what you are doing. Do not be light about it. Let it be a serious matter. Let a man examine himself. Let him be careful of his thoughts and acts. Do you not think there is great need on the Lord's day to be thinking beforehand of the Lord's Supper? I am not speaking of that very unwise and improper practice of looking out some scripture to read aloud on the occasion. This is feeble and wrong. What is the proper way to prepare for the Lord's Supper? What is the theme that will then be specially before us? The Lord's death. Who is there that fully understands what the Lord's death signifies? No person knows anything a part from the revelation of Scripture. The proper preparation for the Lord's Supper is to have before our minds some of those numerous passages of Holy Writ which are inspired by the Holy Ghost so that we might have right and holy thoughts about the sacrifice and death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Saturate your mind with the words of the Holy Ghost in reference to the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Never give yourself up to your own thoughts on that sacred subject. The person who thinks his own thoughts about the death of Christ is sure to end in error and delusion. The one who most rightly appreciates the death of Christ is the one most subject to the word of God, and who will not trust himself to express views about that death in terms other than scriptural.

Throughout the Scripture, in both the Old Testament and the New, we find the great theme of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ recurring, and we have it presented in divers ways. The prayerful study of such passages prepares our hearts so that when we are together we are kept in accord with God's revealed truth about His beloved Son. Let us therefore examine ourselves with regard to this practice, and so let us eat the bread and drink the cup. We are kept by the word of truth, and we may know that the Spirit of God is assuredly directing our thoughts when He brings before us His own words about the death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

#### ONE LOAF, ONE CUP

We also read one or two verses in the tenth chapter, but they refer to the bread and the wine in their symbolism of unity. We see that the loaf sets forth not only the body of Christ that was given for us, but also that it is a figure of that spiritual body which has been framed by the Spirit in this world. All believers are by Him baptized into one body (1 Cor. 12:13). This truth is set before us in the loaf. We, being many members, are one body in Christ. This aspect is subsidiary to the central feature of remembrance. It is just touched upon in this chapter, but we ought not to overlook it, because in partaking of the bread and the wine, we share the one observance in which all believers everywhere are entitled to unite. It is there they meet. It is there that the most spiritually minded of the members of the body of Christ are to be found. What is the state of the believer who does not rejoice in the death of the Lord Jesus Christ? It sets forth the fountain of every blessing for us.

The one loaf speaks of the invisible unity of the mystical body of Christ, and it is an important thing to remember that there is no thought of division expressed in the appointed emblems. There is one cup and one loaf, both showing that imperishable unity which remains true in spite of the undeniable disunion existing in the professing church. These are silent witnesses to the blood-shedding of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But do not let us forget the main object of these Scriptures we have been considering, beloved friends. Do not let us forget the teaching of the Holy Ghost as to the Lord's Supper. The Spirit is present on that occasion to weld our hearts together into holy unity in spiritual worship and joy, and in power of holy recollection with reference to the death—the sufferings and death of our blessed Lord and Master. We need to have this theme brought over and over again before our spirits to fill our souls again and again with devotion and with praise. Why is it we are slow to praise? Because we are slow to realize the value of His death. It is the sense of what He has done that centers our affections upon Himself; and depend upon it, it is worth our while to be together in this prescribed manner to praise our Lord Jesus Christ. One has sometimes heard the painful remark by believers that it seems a waste of time to come together only for the Supper, the time could be made so profitable, there could be such exhortation, but the hour passes, and nothing seems to be done, and there is nothing forthcoming to feed the new man! Oh, what a low view to take, what an altogether misshapen thought of the Supper of our blessed Lord! What can be better than to listen to Him and to hear the whisperings of His love in our hearts? Do we not on such occasions give our hearts over to Him? If so, a human voice, so far from being essential, may obliterate the heavenly voice of our Master. The voice of the Lord's apostle himself could be quiet until the bread was broken at Troas in remembrance of Him. Therefore, let us strive to see more and more in the simple observance of the Lord's Supper, and to maintain a sense of His presence with us in it and of His voice speaking to us concerning His sufferings on our account.

W. J. H.

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The Institution of the Lord's Supper, Lord's Supper: 3. As Recorded in the Acts and Epistles, The Institution of the (20:6-7)

Notes of an Address on Acts 2:41-47; 20:6, 7; 1 Corinthians 10:16, 17; 11:20-29

Last week we read the passages from the Gospels which record the institution of the Lord's Supper. There we had the account of the actual circumstances under which the Lord spoke to His disciples on that evening, and set apart the bread and the wine as emblems of His body and His blood, desiring them to eat the bread and drink the wine in remembrance of Himself. It is of interest and help to find that we have also in Scripture instances of the actual observance of the Lord's Supper, showing that the early disciples understood what the Lord wished them to do, and that they very rightly and naturally and spontaneously responded to His desire, and habitually commemorated the Lord's death in the appointed way. And these records shed their light upon the practice that we ourselves should adopt today in observing the words of our Lord.

#### BREAKING BREAD IN JERUSALEM

We find from the first Scripture that I read in the Acts that the disciples in Jerusalem immediately after Pentecost were in the habit of breaking bread together. It was a practice that they all speedily adopted as a company. There were the apostles who preached, there were disciples who had known the Lord in the days of His flesh, there were others who had believed the preaching of the apostles by the Spirit of God, and these were all banded together by the same Spirit who came down on the day of Pentecost, and were given by Him a unity of mind and a unity of purpose. All their hearts and affections were concentrated upon the Person of Jesus who had risen and who had ascended out of their sight. He was out of sight, but not out of mind, nor were His words out of mind. And they were together, being all of this common persuasion, that there was none upon earth and none in heaven comparable to the blessed Person of the Lord Jesus Christ, and whatever had been said of old through Moses or through Isaiah had no greater claim upon them than the words of the Lord Jesus. There was something in the heart of each one of them that desired to carry out the express wish of the Lord. They had His word handed to them, and they felt that that word had authority over them, and that it was therefore incumbent upon them to answer to His word. He said, "This do in remembrance of me," and they therefore continued in the breaking of bread. There were other things of the apostles mentioned which they were careful to maintain—doctrine, fellowship, as well as prayers, but bound up with these church observances and of equal importance, there was the breaking of bread.

I think, beloved friends, that we ought to note well with regard to the breaking of bread that it demands the personal love and devotion of a heart to the Lord Jesus Christ. The ceremony is nothing, the actual act of eating and drinking is nothing in itself, and as we find from some of the Scriptures that I have just read, the mere form may even mislead, and bring a person into a position full of danger and peril to himself. But if the Supper is observed in its simple character, there is nothing sweeter, while there is nothing more powerful on this earth as a spiritual service than the breaking of bread. The observance does not require spiritual advancement and growth, but it does require that the heart of the individual participant shall ring true to the Lord Himself. The Lord's word must be recognized behind the bread and the wine. The Lord Himself must be present to our faith, giving us to realize His approval of our presence and of our actions as well as His acceptance of the love and devotion of our hearts. It is a worship-service designed by our Lord to knit up our hearts to Himself. In our general walk the Lord comes before our hearts in His glory, as the One who is on high, as our Captain, our Lord, as the One whom we shall be like eventually, and He directs to Himself, as the ascended Christ, all our energies and all our services.

But at the Lord's Supper our position is different. We are not then looking at Christ in glory, as the One whom we are serving, and the One to whom we shall go, but at the same Lord conducting us to the foot of the cross, Himself there as the victim, as the Savior, as the One who suffered there with our sins upon Him. Then He, as it were, crushes within us by this remembrance all movements of sin and selfishness, and draws out to Himself those new affections, those new movements of our hearts begotten in us by the Holy Ghost. For this reason, the Lord's Supper is of the greatest value to young Christians, as to old. Could you have younger Christians than these of whom we read in the Acts? Just born again by the Spirit of God, but they nevertheless continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers. Their hearts were brought to realize in these occupations the living presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. I will repeat that this realization is of essential importance in the spiritual life of every believer. It may be said that there is no occupation on earth of collective

character in which the spiritual life is brought into closer touch with Christ than at the proper observance of the Lord's Supper.

I only allude to these verses in Acts 2; they can be studied at your leisure, but we do find from them that the disciples, being all together in Jerusalem, were enabled day by day to break bread. They broke bread from house to house, or rather, at home. They met together in the Temple; they broke bread at home. They assembled in many places, but at home in their upper rooms they broke bread, and day by day was not considered too frequent to remember the Lord Jesus in breaking bread. The Lord had said, "This do in remembrance of me." These words are a deathblow to the notion of those persons who sometimes assume an air of superiority and say, "I can remember the Lord anywhere. I can sit in the privacy of my chamber and remember Him. I can walk along the street and remember Him." This may be so, but this is not to eat the Lord's Supper. "Do this for a memorial of me," it is therefore only in the doing that the obedience is rendered. The Lord has not given us a thousand acts to do in His name. He has not surrounded us with manifold rites and ceremonies, but there is this one thing specially specified for us to do in remembrance of Him.

#### BREAKING BREAD AT TROAS

In the second passage that I read from the Acts, we have a very interesting record. There we find the apostle Paul at Troas, and evidently Luke, the writer of the book of the Acts, was also of the company, for he speaks, as you notice, in the first person. They came together on the first day of the week to break bread. It was not possible for the disciples to be together for this purpose every day as they did in Jerusalem. There were many who had come to Jerusalem to keep the feast of the passover and the feast of weeks and were free from secular occupations and duties, and they had special opportunities to meet together every day, but it was not so at Troas. We find that the apostle had to wait there until the first day of the week in order to break bread. It was striking that the apostle did so, because he was in a great hurry. He was bound for Jerusalem, and his time was precious. His time was so pressing that he could not visit the important assembly at Ephesus, but sent for the elders to meet him at Miletus. But Paul abode in Troas seven days for the breaking of bread. The great apostle waited seven days so that he might enjoy the incomparable privilege of breaking bread with the disciples.

We find from the narrative that the definite purpose for which they came together was to break bread. The Revised Version reads, "When we came together to break bread," expressing the unity between the visitors and the local believers. Yet the occasion of the gathering was quite unique. The great apostle to the Gentiles would be there. The disciples would hear something valuable from his lips. Paul was a man worth listening to. We might have supposed, therefore, that they would have come together specially to listen to those precious exhortations and instructions that would be sure to fall from the lips of the apostle. But they came together to break bread. They came together to meet the Lord of the apostles. They realized that there was an order in divine things, and first and foremost in divine things is the Lord Himself. Happy the man who always keeps first things first. Christ is first; the Lord is first. His claims must be supreme. Let us everyone here to-night make this our life's motto. Let the Master be first.

And so, when they came together on that first of the week, the one object before them all was to carry out the Lord's word. It was as if they said: 'We shall get a word from the apostle, but let us fulfill our responsibility to the Lord first of all!' Beloved friends, let us all strive to have within our habits and dispositions continually the consciousness that the breaking of bread must stand first and foremost in the claims upon us. Let us feel that the Supper is the Lord's wish, it is His word. It is His claim that is laid upon us, and we must not deny Him the worship of our hearts. Let us agree that we will put ourselves to all kinds of discomfort, but we will not miss the breaking of bread, and when we come together, we will come together with this object before our minds. Do not wait until we enter the door and our eyes fall upon the bread and the wine that then for the first time we think of the breaking of bread. When we come together, this should be the object filling our hearts; we should all come to break bread. Let there be ten, twenty, or an hundred or more, and if we all come to break bread, what a meeting there will be! What power there will be, because all hearts will be united with the common purpose and aim of breaking bread. All will be desirous of fulfilling the word of the Lord. Will any then miss a sense of that joy and peace whose source is in heaven? Not one.

#### THE FIRST OF THE WEEK

This example at Troas is of special interest because of the association of the breaking of bread with the first of the week. There is a beautiful bond, as it were, existing between the first of the week and the breaking of bread. The first of the week was it not then that our Lord rose victorious from the grave? Did He not come forth and make Himself known to His disciples on that memorable first of the week? And He also made Himself known, we are sure, there at Troas on that first of the week. It is the day when He loves to display Himself to the faithful hearts of His disciples. It is a day that stands out notably in the Christian's history, because of its hallowed association with the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord in His rising power and glory makes Himself known on the first day of the week. And so at Troas they came together on that day for the breaking of bread, and afterward the apostle delivered a discourse to them, it being the eve of his departure on the morrow, and he continued his speech until midnight.

#### THE LORD'S SUPPER AT CORINTH

Let us now come to the Epistle to the Corinthians. There we have very full instructions with regard to the breaking of bread. In the 1 Corinthians 11, you have them set out in detail, and they repay close attention. You find that the breaking of bread is here called the Lord's Supper. They had been coming together, but they had not been eating the Lord's Supper in a true sense. I wish you to notice in this chapter the recurrence of the title of the Master as Lord—the Lord's Supper, the Lord Jesus, the Lord's death, the Lord's body. And the reason for this repetition is easy to find. Because they had forgotten—perhaps—nay, they must have forgotten, that He was the Lord. The Lord Jesus conveys to us as an expression His power and authority which are not absent when we remember Him as the crucified One. Jesus was there at Calvary. He went into that place of seeming weakness, "crucified in weakness," uplifted between the two malefactors. But God raised Him from the dead and made Him Lord and Christ. He is Lord of all, Lord of every one of us, and has the right of perfect control and command over everything that we have and are. There is not a pulse of our beings but is under the strict supervision of our Lord. And we are always responsible to Him for what we do, what we say, and what we think. Much more than when we "do this" are we responsible to our Lord. The Corinthians had forgotten Him in this respect, and they had made the Supper their own supper. They had looked upon their own things and had lost sight of the things of the Lord. It is easy to forget the Lord's presence, and then it is that the true value of the Lord's Supper is lost.

It is natural for persons to be attracted most by extraordinary acts and uncommon scenes which appeal to the senses. In the absence of such it is difficult for many to concentrate their hearts and thoughts in remembrance and worship. There is one object, however, that will command the attention of the most careless and fitful persons, and that is the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. He collects wandering thoughts; He subdues the restless spirit. He speaks, as it were, within the tumultuous heart, and says, "Peace, be still." And so, when we are together, on the occasion of the Supper, the Lord Himself comes into vision. I am speaking, of course, of the faith of the heart. Observing the Supper develops this faculty of our faith. Since we come together to think of Him, to remember Him, it develops our hearts and minds in the memory of Himself and in the sense of His presence. The oftener we do this, the better we should do it.

I do not know what words I can use to impress the importance of this feature of the observance of the Lord's Supper upon all who are here to-night—the great importance of being able to realize on such occasions the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. You know that a person can go away into his own room and shut the door, and know the secret presence of Christ with him. That must surely be in accordance with the experience of us all. But that experience should also be true collectively when we come together, and it can only be so when our hearts and minds are set on the things of the Lord Jesus Christ, and not on our own things and the things around us. There is, as we know, a continual effort to draw away our thoughts from the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is always something apt to arise between our souls and Him, to fill our minds with matters not proper to the Lord's Supper and the Lord's Table, and therefore continual effort and watchfulness are needed and prayer to the Lord Himself, who will never fail us. The Corinthians had absolutely broken down and failed in this particular. They had fallen so far as to desecrate the Lord's Supper, reducing it to a common meal. Oh, how the heart of the apostle was horrified by what they were doing. He writes to them urgently, impressively, to win their hearts back to an apprehension of the real character of the Lord's Supper.

#### THE LORD'S SUPPER AND THE LORD'S DAY

We find this phrase, the "Lord's Supper," is a peculiar one in Scripture usage. It is a term which in the original text is not applied to anything else except to the Lord's Day. The Lord's Day and the Lord's Supper are therefore two opportunities which are sacred to the Lord Himself. It is the Lord's day, it is no one else's. The day is hallowed because it belongs to Him, and wherever you are you can never destroy that bond between the Lord and His own day. This term is full of meaning to a Christian. It is the day of resurrection. If Christ be not raised, we are yet in our sins; but He was raised, on the Lord's day. Everything belongs to the Risen One, and that day, the first of the week, is His day, the first of a new order of things, the beginning of the new creation of God.

But there is the Lord's Supper too. That simple homely meal is His. He is there. It is His feast, He presides, He makes the Supper what it is ideally. Take the Lord away, and what is it? Well, for Corinth it was an occasion for gluttony amongst the rich, and for envy and dissatisfaction amongst the poor. Instead of holy thoughts, instead of worship and prayers and thanksgiving, instead of bowing at the throne of glory and grace, they were carried away by earthborn feelings, and so it became to them an unholy occupation. But the Lord by His apostle recalls their hearts to Himself in words which are familiar to us.

We gather from these verses what is really important instruction. The apostle Paul received special revelation with regard to the Lord's Supper. He says, "I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you." You know that the apostle Paul was not one of those who saw Christ in the flesh, but he saw Him in the glory. The Lord communicated direct with the apostle of the uncircumcision. He had special work for him to do, and He gave him special instructions. The Lord could have made this memorial service known to him through the twelve, of course, but it was so ordered that the instructions with regard to the Lord's Supper should be communicated personally to the apostle Paul by the Lord Himself. Does not this fact strike you as strongly emphasizing the importance of the Lord's Supper as a Christian institution? We saw last week the beautiful and affecting picture of the Lord Jesus in the upper room, dispensing the bread and the wine to His disciples, and giving to them a significance they never had before. We also recalled the solemn associations of the institution of that Supper, what was proceeding at the table itself, and what was immediately before the Lord, and so our hearts were directed by these circumstances to its beauty and value. We now learn something fresh. Not the Lord at the table, but the Lord on the throne communicated with the apostle the details with regard to the breaking of bread. The Lord in His glory thought it needful to speak directly to Paul and to tell him His mind with reference to the Supper. Was it not of the highest importance, therefore, since the Lord made it the subject of special revelation? It is indeed of importance. The Lord is continually teaching our hearts to feel its value and importance in an increasing degree.

The apostle said, in effect, to those men at Corinth, "What are you doing? I cannot praise you in this. You have altogether strayed from the real meaning of the Lord's Supper. Do you know that I received it from the Lord? It was not my own ordinance. I did not receive it from Peter, James and John I received it direct from the Lord. It has therefore the utmost claim upon you. Do not think it is anything which can be undertaken lightly. It is solemn, it is holy, and the Lord Himself has desired that your whole hearts should be in it." The apostle spoke by the Holy Ghost, of course, but here he says, "I am speaking to you not merely as an apostle. I am communicating to you that which I received from the Lord Himself." Always remember that this Epistle to the Corinthians was not only to the saints at Corinth, but to all calling upon the name of the Lord Jesus everywhere (1 Cor. 1:2). As Gentiles we come within the scope of this communication made to the apostle of the Gentiles. The Lord's Supper comes to us, therefore, from the Lord Himself through the apostle Paul.

#### THE NIGHT OF THE BETRAYAL

"The Lord Jesus, the same night in which He was betrayed." Have you ever at the Lord's Table pondered upon this expression? — "the same night in which He was betrayed." Why is it brought into this passage? The betrayal is mentioned, I think, so that they might recollect that the Lord's Supper is to be observed, not in heaven, but on earth. The betrayal was a fruit of sin. In heaven there will be nothing of sin, nothing of self; hence nothing will be necessary to recall wandering hearts there. But here upon the earth, even at the Lord's Supper, there is a possibility of the presence of that which is not of God, that which is of self, that which is sinful making its appearance. It is painfully true that you may go where you will, but you can never escape from the danger of your own natural heart and the natural hearts of others.

"On that night in which He was betrayed, He took bread." These people at Corinth were exposed to the danger of doing, not to the same degree, but the same kind of thing that, in its full development, led Judas to betray his Master. We must not execrate Judas and forget ourselves. The Lord did not speak harshly to him. His deed of shame is recorded in holy writ for our warning, not, however, that we should gaze upon Judas, but rather upon the Lord, and think what sorrow it was to Him to say, "One of you shall betray me." He cared for Judas, and

yet Judas betrayed Him. Recall what He has done for you, for me. Is it possible that I can forget Him even in the solemn moment appointed for remembrance? that I may be engaged unworthily even at such a time as that? that my eyes may be drawn away from Him to consider others, and that I might even think evil thoughts at such an occasion as His Supper? What would it be to the Lord's heart if I should forget Him when I am together with others to remember Him in the breaking of bread?

Beloved friends, it magnifies in our eyes the Christ we adore and serve that in the night in which He was betrayed He took means to awaken the weak and forgetful hearts of His own lest they should wander farther and farther from Himself, and from the remembrance of His coming cross and passion, and so He established this feast of bread and wine. Not that Judas was present at the Lord's Supper, because we find from these verses that the Supper, the Lord's Supper, was instituted after the passover. It was "when He had supped" (verse 25), and Judas went out directly he received the sop from the Lord. The Lord gave him the sop, and said, "That thou doest, do quickly," and after the exit of the traitor this ordinance was founded. Can you think of the Lord requiring Judas to do this, "in remembrance of me"? No, it is true hearts He wants. He wants your worship, your fellowship in His sufferings. "Could ye not watch with me one hour?" the Lord said to Peter in Gethsemane. Shall it be that we become tired of being together to think of Him, and when there is silence and opportunity for deep meditation upon the holy theme of the Lord's Supper, we fretfully wish someone would speak, or sing, or pray? Let the Lord's word come home again to you: "Could ye not watch with me one hour?"

[W. J. H.)

(To be continued)

Breaking Bread at Troas, Breaking Bread at Troas: 3 (20:7)

It has already been noted that the gathering together of the saints at Troas (Acts 20:7) was the united action of the assembly in that town. And the phraseology employed is such as indicates a common and habitual custom of the church of God. This indication is certainly obscured in our ordinary version through the use of the third person for the first. But the revised and other critical translations restore the true force of the passage by rendering a better text "when we were gathered together to break bread" (verse 7), and again, "in the upper chamber where we were gathered together" (verse 8).

These words are sufficiently precise to establish that we have here a spontaneous action in concert of the assembly; while not a syllable implies that they were specially summoned to hear Paul's parting instructions and exhortations. In further confirmation of this view it may be not without profit and interest to refer briefly to similar expressions used in this very book.

The assembly in Jerusalem was certainly not specially convoked on the occasion recorded in Acts 4:31. On the contrary it was so much the habitual arrangement for them to be together at that particular time, that Peter and John, on being dismissed with threats by the Jewish council, went direct to their own company where united prayer was made to God. "And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together *συνηγμένοι* as in Acts 20:7, 8: cf. Acts 4:31.

In contra-distinction from this instance of formal and customary meeting we find that, when Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch after their tour of service in the gospel, they "gathered the church together" and "rehearsed all that God had done with them" (Acts 14:27). Again, when Barnabas and Paul with Judas and Silas returned to the same place with a certain communication from the assembly at Jerusalem, it states "when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle" (Acts 15:30). In like manner, Paul calls together the Ephesian elders to Miletus (Acts 20:17).

Here then are three instances of special gatherings of the saints by invitation, and each is distinguished by that form of expression we might expect from the stated and usual gatherings of the saints in their corporate capacity.

At Troas therefore we are undoubtedly taught that the visitors gathered together along with the whole assembly to break bread, just as Barnabas and Paul had previously done for a whole year at Antioch (Acts 11:26); and those who deny this wrest the scripture to the damage of their own souls and of the souls of others.

But turning to another kind of perversion of the truth there are those<sup>1</sup> who will have it that breaking of bread has reference to the love-feast or the social meal eaten by the early Christians and not to the Lord's supper except as a minor adjunct; but not so those who are bound by the clear and unequivocal language of scripture.

The usage of the phrase "breaking of bread" in the Acts is surely convincing in itself. Speaking of the Pentecostal assembly, the record is "and they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers" (Acts 2:42). This use of the term along with "the apostles' doctrine and fellowship" and the "prayers" forbids our reducing the breaking of bread to common social intercourse or even the love-feast. Indeed it is expressly distinguished from ordinary meals in the verses that follow. "And they continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread at home, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people" (vers. 46, 47). So that breaking of bread cannot be confounded with eating meat on this occasion; and it is the evident intention of the Spirit that they should not be so confounded.

In the passage, Acts 20, the same distinction is maintained. In verse 11, after the Eutychian episode, Paul returned to the upper chamber, broke the bread, ate, and conversed till break of day. This does not sound like the Eucharist as it is often supposed to be,<sup>2</sup> which is invariably referred to as the action of the whole assembly. Compare verse 7, "when we come together to break bread"; and 1 Cor. 10:16, "The bread which we break." But in verse 11 it is Paul who breaks the bread, as he does in Acts 27:35, after the fourteen days' fast on ship-board. Here the apostle, after his discourse and before his long journey which was to commence at dawn, partakes of the loaf to satisfy his hunger; so that eating in this case is not participating in the feast of remembrance, but taking a meal as in Acts 10:10; in connection with which

“conversing” is appropriately used, in distinction from the more formal discourse that had gone before.

Page's note on the passage therefore<sup>3</sup> is quite groundless. “They had come together to break bread”; this would have taken place naturally at the end of Paul's discourse but for the interruption; he now therefore resumes the interrupted order of the meeting by breaking the bread.”

This comment contains at least two assumptions which are without the slightest scriptural warrant. He assumes (1) that although the saints came together expressly to break bread, the act of remembrance was as a matter of course put aside for the purpose of listening to Paul's farewell discourse; so that, according to such exposition, to eat the Lord's supper was but a nominal reason for gathering. And it was quite “natural” too for the feast to be supplanted by ministry of the word, not necessarily introductory to the solemn observance, but as in this case a final charge in view of the apostle's immediate departure! Such a theory is without the support of a single word of scripture. It is never of the Spirit of God to displace the claims of the Lord by the claims of the church, or of the very foremost of the apostles. If the ministry of Paul was needful to the saints, the breaking of bread was due to the Lord. Nor would the apostle himself be a party to setting aside in any way what he had insisted upon in his recent epistle to the Corinthians. He could find no word of praise for the assembly at Corinth in respect of their observance of the feast; indeed he sharply rebukes them for the very thing for which misguided men contend as the truth. For it was at Corinth not at Troas where we find the saints allowing social intercourse to stultify if not to destroy the solemn character of the remembrance of the Lord. “What! have ye not houses to eat and drink in? or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not?” (1 Cor. 11:22.) They truly came together in one place, but it was not (in effect) to eat the Lord's supper (1 Cor. 11:20). For, although their professed object in gathering was as at Troas to eat the Lord's supper, on account of the flagrant disorders that prevailed that object was nullified. So that, as the apostle tells them, they came together “not for the better but for the worse” (ibid). It is true that there were in the young Corinthian assembly the excesses of drunkenness and gluttony: but the principle enforced is that the Lord's desire on the night in which He was betrayed is paramount to all besides. And this principle effectually disposes of every human arrangement that tends to enfeeble the transcendent claims of the Lord's supper, whether it be an agape or a liturgy or a sermon apostolic (or otherwise).

The second assumption in the quotation made above is (2) that as a matter of course Paul breaks the bread—that is, in an official capacity. This likewise is without scriptural support. We have seen that the reference is to eating to appease hunger, and not to the feast of remembrance at all (ver. 11).

But so far from affording ground for presidency<sup>4</sup> at the table of the Lord, scripture teaches that there all saints meet as one for the remembrance of Him. The Corinthians in their levity were introducing class distinctions at the supper, and even of a worldly character: the rich ignored the poor; self, not Christ, ruled to their shame. The apostle gravely reproved them and told them plainly that, in bringing personalities into prominence, they made it “their own” supper and not the Lord's.

The truth is that the breaking of bread is the action of the whole assembly of saints at which the Lord and none else presides, not even Paul or Peter. For the same one who declared himself not one whit behind the very chiefest of the apostles also confessed himself as less than the least of all saints. When it was a question of communicating the truth of God, he did so as an apostle and a prophet, as a teacher and a preacher. When it was a question of remembering the Lord he mingled with the rest. But it was the carnal desire for formalism that introduced the figment of ministerial administration in sub-apostolic days to the immeasurable loss of all concerned. What the Lord designed to bring the souls of His own in contact with Himself (“This do in remembrance of Me”), man thus perverts by setting up a medium between the soul of the saint and the One he remembers. Surely every child of God should resist such an innovation and all else that would hinder or mar the true character of the hallowed fellowship at the table of the Lord. W. J. H.

[NOTE—Is it not instructive to notice that the correction of abuse (which the apostle effected by recalling the Lord's supper in its true order, aim, and character as revealed expressly to himself) is introduced and closed, before the subject of the Holy Spirit and of His varied action in gift is entered on? No one would think of so treating either the one or the other according to the traditional practice of Christendom. For men are apt unconsciously to read and interpret scripture according to their ecclesiastical habits day by day. It is clear that God has written His word so as to be a standard of truth, to let us know what His mind was from the beginning, and thus to counteract that slipping away from His will, which is even more easy and inveterate in the Christian profession than it was in the previous Jewish one. The leveling of God's order is religious rebellion. This was at work actively at Corinth against the apostle himself. Similar evils have developed more and more to this day. All the more are the faithful called to own and honor His good pleasure. “And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers,” etc. God has not abdicated His rights. But this other weighty matter is distinctly and designedly separated from the due and divinely appointed celebration of the Lord's supper. The disorder therein was not made the charge of elders even, or of any other official, but pressed home on the conscience and spiritual feelings of the saints themselves. Meanwhile the Lord, Whom they forgot, did not forget to chasten the guilty that they might not be condemned with the world.

The fact is that few of God's children are conscious how great and wide the departure is from the only standard of authority. Thus do we often hear of the church teaching this or that. How opposed to scripture! The church is taught and never teaches. The word of God comes to the church, and to all the church (not to one only), never from it: and for this God employs His servants. It is ministerial work, not at all the church's place. But the Lord's supper is essentially the church's feast, wherein ministers, however eminent, merge as saints, and the Lord alone is exalted in the communion of His infinite love and the incalculable indebtedness of each and all to His death. “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not communion with the body of Christ? For we, being many, are one bread, one body; for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Cor. 10:16, 17). Sin once leveled all where difference vanished; so does grace now in the remembrance of Him. It is good and right to own the Lord in every servant He sends; it is as least as good, if not better still, even here below to enjoy that blessed and holy supper, where such distinctions disappear in remembering Him Who died for our sins, and Who deigns to give His real presence in our midst. En. B. T.]

(Concluded).

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It therefore appears from the account in Acts 20 that the saints on that particular occasion came together in their ordinary and customary manner for the purpose of breaking bread on the first of the week.

It is true that, in earlier days, the disciples at Jerusalem broke bread more frequently. But they or at least many of the saints were specially found there then, as visitors unfettered by secular duties, rather than as residents; and in the love and joy of their hearts they took advantage of their opportunity, and day by day kept the feast at home (that is, in private houses in contrast with the temple). "And they continuing daily with one accord in the temple and breaking bread from house to house (at home) did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart" (Acts 2:46). But at Troas we have the practice not of Jewish but of Gentile believers, and that as occurring under no such exceptional circumstances, but amid the general routine of their daily lives.

From both instances it is ours to profit. At the institution of the Supper, the Lord Himself made no restrictions. "This do in remembrance of Me" was His own word to the apostles of the circumcision; but nothing did He lay down as to the frequency of participation. Neither when making a special revelation to the apostle of the Gentiles,<sup>1</sup> did the Lord define the interval that should separate the observances of the feast of remembrance. From His silence on this point therefore it may surely be gathered with the utmost certainty that He has left it to the love and fidelity of our hearts to respond to His own expressed desire by eating bread and drinking wine as often as circumstances will allow. And this we have seen was the practice in early days. In Jerusalem at the first the saints were able to break bread at home daily. In Troas the custom was to gather for that purpose on the first of the week. Considering both examples, we conclude that they were under neither the incitement nor the restriction of any rigid rule, but that they met together as often as was possible.

It must however be observed that the first of the week affords the most suitable occasion on which to celebrate this feast. What can be more fitting than that the Lord's Supper should be eaten on the Lord's day? To both the supper and the day the Lord has prefixed His title in a distinctive way, thus marking them out as His in a special sense (1 Cor. 11:20; Rev. 1:10). If the use of this term (κυριακός) elevates the supper above any ordinary meal, as the apostle argues in 1 Cor. 11, contrasting the "Lord's supper" with "their own supper," it is none the less true that the Lord's day is in a similar manner distinguished from every other day of the week. Notably it was upon this day that the Lord arose. How salutary therefore that the joyful associations of His resurrection should be mingled with and tempered by the solemn remembrance of His death! It was also upon the first day of the week that the Lord twice appeared to the apostles when gathered together (John 20:19, 26); while upon the same day of the week the Holy Ghost descended at Pentecost to form and indwell the church of God on earth. So that there is no lack of reason for the settled custom of breaking bread on the Lord's day as shown to exist at Troas.

So much for the occasion or time upon which it was usual for them to gather together; let us now consider their intention in so assembling. This is lucidly and definitely expressed in the scripture before us, "and on the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul discoursed to them." Their professed object is thus specifically declared to have been "to break bread." And this is stated without word or comment, which would certainly have been added had there been anything peculiar in this celebration.

It is well to note that, though Paul himself was there, his presence was not allowed to overshadow the claims of the Lord. For it was avowedly the breaking of bread that brought them together, showing what supreme control it had over their hearts, and that even the ministry of the great apostle himself ranked but as a secondary matter. No doubt the bulk of the saints were there; and after announcing the Lord's death, advantage was taken by Paul to discourse to them in a farewell fashion, "being about to depart on the morrow."

It cannot but be believed that, in the previous week, the active and zealous servant of Christ used every opportunity to impart the truth to the brethren both in public and in private. But now he was on the point of leaving them—perhaps to see their faces no more. And the apostle loved them every one as a father loves his children. As he spoke, his heart swelled with that tender anxiety for their spiritual welfare peculiarly characteristic of Paul; so that he prolonged the word till midnight. Blessed season of refreshing without doubt! But the Holy Ghost is particular to record the facts in such a way as to leave it unmistakable that the saints, without in the least undervaluing apostolic gift, met together, not to hear the farewell discourse, but to break bread.

But another point deserves consideration. The correct reading, without question, is as already quoted, "when we were gathered together" etc. not "when the disciples came together" etc. The emendation is by no means unimportant and rests on ample authority. The action of gathering together is not referred to the local saints only, but the expression implies that the visitors also joined. Paul and his company were as much concerned in the assembling together as the disciples in Troas. In the revised form of the text there is not the slightest ground for the unworthy assumption that the band of laborers were themselves relieved from the responsibility, not to say privilege, of breaking bread, nor for the equally baseless inference that the Lord's Supper is a mere matter of local arrangement. On the contrary, the coming together was the united action of the whole assembly of God in Troas including the travelers.

In reference to the expression, "when we gathered together," it should not be overlooked that while "we" is often used in the Acts to indicate Luke's own presence in connection with the events he is narrating, on the other hand "we" is the invariable word used in the New Testament to introduce what is characteristic of the whole of the saints of God, corporately or in the aggregate.

Thus, when Paul writes in Rom. 5:1, "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God," can it be doubted that "peace with God" is the common portion of every soul justified by faith? So throughout the epistle the standing of believers is taught in a similar way. The apparent exception of "I" in Rom. 7:7-25 proves the rule; for there the apostle takes up the case of one not brought into the knowledge of true Christian privilege but groaning under the law. Hence "we" would there be unsuitable, as the verses are not descriptive of the normal condition of the saints of God; consequently "I" is used to set forth what is a transitional state rather than the proper position of a soul in Christ.

So in 1 Cor. 15:51, 52, to select another of the instances which occur almost in every chapter of the Pauline and catholic epistles." Behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." Here it is evident a revelation is made by the writer himself an apostle and prophet, concerning the whole and not a portion of the saints of God. It is manifestly not true of the Corinthian assembly nor of Paul and Sosthenes that they should not all sleep. They have all been put to sleep by Jesus long since. But the apostle had no such contracted thought, in saying "We shall not all sleep," as to limit its application to his contemporaries. He expressed the common privilege of all the saints, inasmuch as there is no necessity for them to pass through death. In like manner, in writing to the Thessalonians, he says, referring to the coming of Lord, "we which are alive and remain shall be caught up etc." (1 Thess. 4:17). Here as in the epistle to the Corinthians, he contemplates the saints who would be on earth at the Lord's return, without at all implying as some destructive critics suppose, that he had a mistaken assurance of being alive himself. The truth taught is that the general hope and cherished expectation of the saints of God was to be, that they might be not unclothed but clothed upon with their house which is from heaven (2 Cor. 5:2, 3).

In John's first epistle this form of expression is remarkably prevalent, as might be expected in a communication addressed, not to any local assembly, but to the whole family of God in its broadest and most general aspect. "We know" is a formula which constantly occurs.

But surely enough has now been said<sup>2</sup> to indicate that "we" is a recognized mode in the New Testament of enunciating what is universally true in the assembly of God. And it is submitted that in Acts 20:7, "When we came together to break bread," there is an example of this use. The coming together, and the breaking bread were the habitual practice of the church in Troas, and, if there, in all the churches. See 1 Cor. 4:17; 7:17; 11:2, 16.

In accordance with this too, we find in 1 Cor. 10:16, 17, where the principles of distinction between the Lord's table and the table of demons are laid down, that similar language is used. "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, being many, are one bread [and] one body; for We are all partakers of that one bread." The unity of the "we" is expressly declared—one loaf, one body. It is the general truth that is in question, and would apply in Jerusalem, in Antioch, in Troas, as much as in Corinth. But in 1 Cor. 11 where the apostle takes up the particular malpractices of the Corinthian assembly in regard of the Lord's Supper, "ye" is used. "When ye come together therefore, this is not to eat the Lord's supper" (1 Cor. 11:20). Here the local misbehavior is the subject, and not universal practice.

In Acts 20:7 therefore, as it stands in the corrected text, it is taught that it was the established custom of the assembly of God to come together on the first of the week for the express purpose of breaking bread. The words can mean nothing else; for none will seriously contend that "we" includes only Luke and those with him and that it was the party of travelers who came together to break bread, while the others gathered to hear Paul's discourse.

(To be continued, D.V.)

Breaking Bread at Troas, Breaking Bread at Troas: 1 (20:7)

It is of no inconsiderable importance to seek to arrive at a clear understanding, not only of the real intention of the saints at Troas, but of God's mind in the record of their assembling together on the occasion made memorable by the presence of the great apostle of the Gentiles (Acts 20:7). For the practice of the early saints recorded thus by inspiration affords a certain guide for the observance of the church from that time onward; because in as far as their example is approvingly cited by the Holy Ghost, so far may saints follow with boldness and confidence.

A great distinction however must be made between the inspired account of the founding and development of the assembly of God in apostolic times, and that which proceeded in later but early days when men wrote no longer by the unerring power of the Holy Spirit. The difference is not in degree but in kind. While the Scripture is the adamant rock, the productions of the so-called "Fathers of the church" are the treacherous quicksands: the one affords unyielding support, the others offer nothing but at best a dim uncertainty, coupled with the risk of following their departure from the truth.

The reason for this wide difference is not far to seek; though at the same time it is of such profound importance that no apology is offered for referring to it here. To some it may appear trivial and commonplace to insist upon the inspiration of Holy Writ and to contend that its inspired, character elevates it immeasurably above every other writing whether ancient or modern. But it is certain that none can in these days advance too far in reverence for the Scriptures, or hold too tenaciously that the voice of God is heard in every word from Genesis to Revelation.

The perfect and sufficient presentation of the mind and will of God, under the unerring operation of the Holy Ghost, is to be understood not in the statements of doctrine and in the revelations of the future only. The historical portions are no less divinely given and guarded. Even in recounting events that came under their direct cognizance, the writers were never suffered to pen just what their memories retained or their fancies dictated. The Spirit was there to secure the accomplishment of His own purpose in the Scripture as well as to preclude any human frailty or error.

Thus, in the instance before us, the writer, Luke the physician, was in no wise left to his own wisdom in the compilation of the history. While leaving the impress of his individuality upon his writings, and that so distinctly that they can never be confounded with those of Matthew, Mark, or John, the impress, nevertheless, was such as to include none of the prejudices, the distortions, the foibles, or the partialities that are common to every uninspired historian in a greater or less degree. For the "human element in inspiration," to use a familiar phrase, never supposes or admits any taint of the weakness and wilfulness, the blindness and bias, which are altogether inseparable from fallen human nature.

Indeed in this latter particular the written word of God may be said to resemble the Incarnate Word. In Him, blessed be His holy Name, we have One Who was both God and Man. Since He was the Son and eternal God, He could and did reveal God and the Father. Since in grace He became Man, He revealed the Father in such a sort that we might see and hear, believe and know. Yet though He descended so low in order to bring the fullness of grace and truth to poor ruined man, He remained in that state of immaculate purity which was true of none but of Himself. Unsoiled, unstained, though in the semblance of sinful flesh, perfect without and within, of the Savior alone is it written that He was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners," that "He knew no sin."

In like manner are the Scriptures divine. In the one case God reveals Himself in our nature; in the other He reveals Himself in our speech; but in both cases is there the most rigid exclusion of sinful imperfection. And the reason is patent. For in the word, God reveals Himself and the triumph of His ways of grace over the sin of man. And this is communicated by the Holy Ghost (1 Cor. 2:13); for who indeed but He could write on such a theme? And since He graciously undertook to express the mind of God to man, how daring and impious to impute error in any way to the writings He has inspired for this purpose!

Still the revelation while emanating from the Spirit of God took a human form. It was given to men and intended for men; hence human phraseology and modes of speech were employed. Nay, even the actual state of the language, Hebrew or Greek, when employed, is reproduced there. Nevertheless it is of amazing comfort to know that every expression, however human, is cleansed from the moral imperfection, from the mistakes and misrepresentations, which under all other circumstances are to be found in the writings of even the most accomplished and illustrious authors. So that it is one of the most blessed characteristics of Holy Writ that it forms an absolutely immovable foundation on which the soul may rest. Remembering this truth we desire to examine the passage before us.

"And on the first [day] of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul discoursed to them, about to depart on the morrow, and prolonged the word till midnight<sup>1</sup> (Acts 20:7).

What is the teaching of this Scripture and its context as to the breaking of bread? Was it the general usage of the disciples to assemble on every first day of the week to break bread? In other words, had the breaking of bread such a paramount claim upon the disciples that it was the specific object before them in gathering together? On the other hand, was the breaking of bread deemed by them of such minor importance that the presence of Paul was a sufficient pretext for setting it in the background in favor of the apostle's ministry? The latter view is held by the apologists of ecclesiastical tradition, as well as by the upholders of all but universal modern practice; both of whom unite to rob the Scripture before us of its plain unequivocal meaning by using it to place the Lord's Supper in a subordinate position utterly unknown to either the Gospels or the Epistles. We do not now speak of those who pervert it into a sacrifice for the living and the dead, and the accompanying horrors of that unbelieving and superstitious system.

Let us consider the interesting and instructive circumstances of the breaking of bread at Troas, and notice the unobtrusive way in which they are woven into the texture of the narrative.

The voyage of the party from Philippi occupied five days (Acts 20:6). This was probably longer than it might have been calculated that the vessel would take. At any rate we know that, when they crossed into Europe on a former occasion, the journey between the same towns was accomplished in two days only (Acts 17:11-12). The extension of the two days to five proves pretty conclusively, that in this instance the progress of the ship must have been considerably hindered by contrary winds or the like, to account for the wide difference.

It would appear that the party landed in Troas during the latter part of the first day of the week, or the early part of the second; for they abode in that place seven days (Acts 20:6), which brought them to the next first day of the week. The fact of this lengthened stay is highly significant.

For what reason did Paul protract his stay in Troas at a time when, as we know, he was hastening if possible to be at Jerusalem by the day of Pentecost (Acts 20:16)? He deliberately avoided Ephesus because he would not be delayed on his journey. Yet here at Troas he spends no less than seven days. And it was immediately after leaving Troas that he asked the Ephesian elders to meet him at Miletus, a distance of thirty miles, that no time might be lost. Are we not bound to gather from these facts, that some important consideration was of sufficient weight with the apostle to cause him to tarry so long in Troas?

But the narrative supplies another circumstance which sheds considerable light on the motives of Paul and his companions. When the first of the week did come and the disciples had broken bread together, the apostle was so unwilling to lose another moment that, though he spent the whole of the night in the company of the saints, he set off (we are told) at break of day on foot to Assos. It is clear therefore that Paul remained the seven days in order to be present at the meeting of the church in Troas.

That the period of this stay should be just seven days and no more could hardly escape comment. And it is the more to be remarked upon since we find the mention of the same period at a later stage of this very journey to Jerusalem, and in like manner immediately followed by the departure of the travelers. Luke records that at Tire, "finding disciples, we tarried there seven days." "And when we had accomplished these days, we departed and went our way" (Acts 21:4-5).

Yet another instance occurs in this book. When describing the journey to Rome, Luke writes "we came the next day to Puteoli, where we found brethren; and were desired to tarry with them seven days: and so we went toward Rome" (Acts 28:13-14). This then is the third recorded occasion in the Acts when Paul and his company after a sea voyage remain in the place of landing with the saints just seven days, and then at once recommence their journey.

The explanation that lies on the face of the narrative in Acts 20 supplies the key to the other cases, since no other is given, and the ground or motive is constant. The travelers through unexpected delays on the voyage landed at Troas just too late to join the usual weekly assemblage of the disciples to break bread. In order therefore to partake with them of the customary eucharistic remembrance of Christ, it was necessary to stay a week for the next occurrence.

There would be no such necessity to tarry until the first of the week in order to discourse to them. Of this he could and doubtless did avail himself as far as it was practicable on other days: so we know he subsequently did with the Ephesian elders. But the object of gathering at Troas, &c, was certainly not to hear Paul, though this was of deep interest and a very sufficient reason at other times for such as could be gathered. Here the standing or habitual purpose is expressly declared to have been "to break bread."

At the same time it is noticeable that the purpose is stated without special emphasis or any word of enlargement. This indicates the all-importance, not the unimportance, of the motive of the disciples in so assembling. It attests not only the veracity of the historian but the divine design of the history to those that seek the truth. For there stands written the instructive fact that breaking of bread on the first day was the then established and regularly recognized institution of the Lord for the assembled saints in the apostolic age.

To be continued, ( D. V.)

Bible Treasury: Volume N10, Salvation Possessed and Known (10:42-43)

"And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins" (Acts 10:42, 43). These words form the conclusion of the address of Peter to Cornelius the centurion, and to those assembled in his house. They were the special words in the Apostle's discourse which seem to have been for the centurion's personal benefit, though others show the blessing that ensued. They particularly suited his case. They brought him deliverance and enjoyment and peace in the Holy Ghost.

I want you to look this evening at the words as those addressed to a man who was seeking to know from God that which would settle, once and forever, the great question of his own personal responsibility to his God. Cornelius was not a godless man. He was not a heathen man, in the sense of being a worshipper of false gods. He was a man who recognized that there was one God over all, and that He was the God of the Jews, and that God he most earnestly desired to know. We are told of him, in the commencement of this chapter, that he prayed to God always, and gave alms to the people of God.

This is a striking witness to the character of the man. Cornelius was a Roman soldier, an officer, a man used to command, accustomed to enforce the strict military discipline which characterized the Roman army; but, in spite of the stern habits of his military life, he was a man who had been touched in his heart and conscience. He had seen and felt the follies and abominations of idol worship. He had been stationed in Palestine, the favored land of Jehovah, where prophets had testified of God and His worship. He had been serving in that same land so recently trodden, as it had been, by the feet of the Son of God. And will it be too great a stretch of our imagination to suppose that he learned from that other fellow-soldier of his, that centurion of Capernaum, who loved the nation of the Jews, and had himself come to the lowly Prophet of Nazareth, and besought Him, with faith, such faith in his heart as had never before been known in Israel, that he might receive the words that would heal his sick one would Cornelius have learned something of Jesus of Nazareth from him? And may he not also have heard some report from that other centurion whose duty it was to attend the crucifixion of the Lord of glory, and see that all was done according to the law of that mighty Gentile empire which was holding God's people in a grip of iron at that time? This man was a personal witness of the extraordinary events of that day. He saw a meek and patient Sufferer, lifted up between two malefactors, and yet so different from them. He was indeed always so different from all men, but with what distinction did the Holy Son of man stand apart from those two robbers. This centurion was a witness to the supernatural darkness that covered the land at noonday. He heard, too, that bitter cry of anguish, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" and the officer was smitten in his conscience, and confessed at the close that Jesus was a righteous man—the Son of God.

Cornelius must have heard something of these things. What he believed brought him on his knees to the living and true God. It caused him to love that people whom it was his business to govern in accordance with the exacting laws of his Emperor. For the centurion felt that the Jews were God's people, and he cared for their poor in a conspicuous manner; and yet the man was not at rest inwardly. There was that which was good and beneficent about him. There was that which showed that he had a care for holy things, and for holy persons, and yet the man kept on praying, being in need, of something to satisfy the conscience within him, which told him that he had sinned against God, and that he could not escape the judgment of sin; and he craved to know how sins, his sins, the sins of a Gentile, might be forgiven. He knew God's word, and that he himself was not a lost sheep of the house of Israel, to whom the Messiah came. He might well have said: 'What part have I with the house of Israel? The Messiah is for them, but, alas! not for me.'

Yet Cornelius desired the blessing of God's forgiveness; he was a sinful man, but he prayed always, and he was heard.

Beloved friends, there are many persons in this country, no doubt there are some in this hall to-night, who have a sense that they, too, have sinned against the holy God. They feel that the past, with all its sins, is not quite extinct, but that it will be brought forth again to their condemnation, and they do not as yet see how that past will be dealt with otherwise than to their extreme ruin. They feel that they have sinned against God, and they cannot rest because they believe they must answer for sins in their bodies in the day which is to come. They love to hear of Jesus. They love to hear of the Christ of God. They confess that there is no other Savior among men save Jesus of Nazareth, and yet they are not confident that He is their own Savior; they do not know that their sins are forgiven. They resort to religious ceremonies—and yet they find no rest; the conscience within them will not be quiet. It accuses them again and again of their guilt before God.

Beloved friends, I honor a man who, in this matter, refuses to acquiesce in an authority not duly accredited. How can we rest the eternal destiny of our own souls upon our own feelings, or upon mere fancy? Shall we go to a mortal, failing man like ourselves, and rest upon his word for it? No; in our responsibility to God, we want the word of God as a valid ground of assurance.

There are, perhaps, many here seeking rest and finding none. There is a memory before me of a sight that I witnessed many years ago, which I shall never forget. I was in a well-known "place of worship," one of the most famous in our great Metropolis, and I was inadvertently

the witness of an early morning service. But what still lives before me is the figure of a man who was one of the communicants. He was a tall man, evidently in a state of physical weakness; but there was more than bodily infirmity: there was mental pain, there was a storm of sorrow and anguish depicted on the man's face as he left his pew with others and fell upon his knees. He received the bread and the wine. He then rose and went back to his place; and, dear friends, I shall never forget the look of unrest, of unhappiness and of intense agony of spirit written upon his face as he returned to his pew, threw himself upon the bench with his hands spread out, and his head bent upon his arms. He had evidently come there that morning to find in the ceremony something that would satisfy his heart. He had been through it, and, at the close, there was the sense that it was all of no use. The ceremony did not give him a solid basis on which to rest his soul.

The man was, no doubt, true, sincere and right in motive, but there was no need for his vain search after peace. The blessed Jesus was ready to speak the word of peace to him, only he was looking manward, to the outward ceremonial, to something that he could see and hear. All the while the gracious Savior was saying to him, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." The Savior gives rest by His word, and it is only when you have His word coming to you personally that you can afford to dismiss the great question of your guilt, once and forever, as a settled matter.

What was it that the blessed Master said to the woman who sought forgiveness of sins? "Thy sins are forgiven thee." "Thy" The same forgiveness was for everyone who was in Capernaum to find, if they sought it. The sinful woman sought it. And to her the Lord said, "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace."

Beloved friends, there is no other way of settling the great question. There is no other way of obtaining peace of soul, save by coming to the Lord Jesus Christ, and hearing His word to you:

Now, how was this man, Cornelius, to get such a word from Jesus? Jesus was gone. He had been here. He had left memories behind Him, sweet memories of His ministry, throughout Judaea and Galilee. The savor of the Presence that had been was not lost. What could Cornelius do but pray to God? And his prayer rose up as a memorial to God, a sweet sacrifice, as it were, to Him. He was one anxious and desiring to know for himself the fullness of the salvation of God, through our Lord Jesus Christ; and the man who seeks such knowledge shall not be disappointed. The Lord Himself was no longer in Palestine; but His ambassadors were. As He was sent into the world, so He sent His emissaries—the apostles—into the world to represent Him (John 17:18).

Accordingly, God sent His word to this man who was a Gentile, a Gentile soldier, one of the conquerors of God's ancient people. He sent the apostle Peter to speak the word to him that should dear his soul in its anxiety, and settle every doubt. Now, we know that Cornelius understood very definitely that Peter was coming to speak to him, that Peter was God's messenger to him, that he was directed to deliver God's word to him. Peter would be only the channel. The much-desired word was coming through him, and it would not be the word of a mere man. When the centurion met Peter, and had gathered together his friends, he said: "Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God."

Dear friends, in the great question of the sin of a man's soul there are two persons concerned—the man himself and God. It is one of the cardinal truths of the gospel that in His grace the Savior God comes down to meet this individual need: It is a device of Satan to adulterate and corrupt the gospel, and to introduce some medium between God and the sinner. No, beloved friends, there is but one Mediator between God and man; the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost. He sought the individual where he was, and now God is sending His word through the Scriptures to the individual.

There may be a word in my text to-night for some hearer personally. You may have a similar difficulty to Cornelius upon your heart. You know you have sinned, and want your sins forgiven, and you are asking, 'How am I to know that they are forgiven? On what ground?' I do not know any possible trustworthy ground but God's holy word, and, having this, you need not fear all the powers of Satan. There is no power in this world, or under this world, which can destroy the imperishable word of God. The Lord said: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my word shall not pass away."

Here is the Bible. Here is God's word, but, beloved friends, you must receive it for yourself. You must be able to open this word and say: 'I know that, if there is no other person in the wide world, God is speaking to me.' It is comforting to that extent to know that God is speaking to others, and a person may well be rejoicing in this fact, but it is a different matter if I feel He may leave me out of the blessing, and while other persons have their sins forgiven, I am not included in the company. What a loss for me! The case of the new blessing which others had recently received must have been known to Cornelius, for Caesarea was not so far from Jerusalem, and the news spread rapidly of the people who were receiving the gospel. They had come into the town in the fullness of their joy, and spoken of the joys of their salvation. The sight of their ecstasy led Cornelius to pray, 'Oh, that I knew my sins were forgiven! Oh, that I might have the remission of my sins!' And God sent Peter to speak to him this particular point of anxiety.

We have not much time to look into details of the apostolic visit, but will pass on to the particular moment when the word met Cornelius. Peter is referring, in the two verses I have read, to the Lord Jesus Christ, and he speaks first of all of Him risen from the dead, and ordained of God to be Judge of quick and dead. What is the special relation of this fact to the anxious man? What did this mean to the soul of Cornelius? Jesus ordained to be the Judge of quick and dead! Have you ever thought seriously of this, beloved friends? It is admittedly a commonly received truth. We know that Jesus Christ is the One who is coming to judge the quick and the dead, but have you ever considered what the prediction involves? The One who was once on this earth, stretched out upon the cross, in the place of shame (so far as this world's judgment is concerned), is He who not only rose from the dead, but into whose hand is placed the responsibility of the eternal judgment of men and women, whether they be alive or dead.

Friends, in the interests of eternal justice there is before us the great work of examining the lives of men and women, and adjudicating upon their words and deeds, and administering due punishment, and the Person into whose hands this work is committed is that Holy Man who suffered on Calvary's cross. Is it not wonderful to contemplate that He will sit on His throne, and that the nations of the earth shall be gathered before Him, and that out of His mouth shall proceed the sentence of judgment? It is so. The Man whom the world despises is the One into whose hands is committed all judgment. Man regenerate or unregenerate has never paid adequate regard to the Lord Jesus Christ. There is many a person who is losing his way in the things that pertain to spiritual life, because he is seeking joy and rest apart from the Lord

Jesus Christ. No man can neglect the veneration of Christ without serious loss. And the gospel of the grace of God is the one that exalts Jesus, and puts Him in the highest heavenly glory—a present Savior, a coming Judge. Would you not, then, like to be on the side of that Judge? Would you not like to have Him for you? If He is for you, oh! how good and blessed! If He assures you now concerning the forgiveness of your sins, oh! how safe must you be in the day of wrath which is to come!

There are persons—possibly Cornelius was one of them—who have that great day of judgment ever before their minds. They think of that time so awful, when all the world will be assembled before the throne, and will be there to be judged. They dread lest they shall then hear the word, “Depart from me”; and they say, ‘I can never rest until that day is past.’

I am considering the case of those who are really in earnest, and seeking the salvation of their souls, and who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, but are fearful of what is to come. But, beloved friends, think that it is Jesus who will be there, and that He speaks to you now! What does He say to you now? Does He not say unto you, “I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish”? Does He not say unto you, “He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life”? If the Judge Himself says to you, ‘You shall not come into judgment!’ you have this word for your reliance. If there is anyone who can speak to you about the time of judgment, surely it is the One who is ordained to judge the quick and the dead. And He says that the believer shall never come into judgment. Is this sufficient? Is this a word for you? Can you suppose for a moment that the robber on the cross, to whom the Lord said, “To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise” —can you believe that this one shall yet be brought before the Lord as the Judge of quick and dead, to be judged, to decide whether heaven or hell shall be his eternal lot, he having been in the paradise of God now for some two thousand years? He had the Lord's word to him; and He said, “To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise.” It was to comfort and assure him in the last hours of his agony. And he passed in peace of heart into the presence of his Lord and Savior.

And so we just come back to this concise test. Have you received the word of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving unto you assurance for the future, as well as the forgiveness of your past sins?

But it was not only the fact that Jesus was ordained to be the Judge that Peter advanced. The apostle unfolded a further truth which Cornelius needed to know. He went on to say, “To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.” Jesus, risen from the dead, is Lord of all, not merely of the Jews. He is the Lord of all men and all things, for all things are put under His feet; and this too was meant to enlighten the centurion. Jesus, walking through this world, was not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel; but, risen from the dead, there are for the Savior no national limits. There is no Gentile or Jew beyond the grave. There are here geographical distinctions that mark men off from one another, but beyond the grave there are none, and that is where the Lord of glory is. The risen Christ spoke through Peter as the One who had come out from among the dead; and His grace was flowing out to all men, as the prophets of old had given witness, that whosoever believeth in Him should receive remission of sins.

Cornelius found himself within the scope of this message. ‘That is where I come in. That is exactly the word that addresses me.’ Such clearly was his belief.

The force of this word of God is such that wherever a man is, whatever a man is, should he believe, he will receive remission of his sins. It is not a question of his bowing to some ceremony. A man is not required to be circumcised, to keep the law of Moses and thus be saved; such is not the truth of God in the gospel. The truth of God is that, whatever a sinner may be, let him come to the Savior as a sinner, and let him receive the remission of sins.

Then and there the word of the gospel entered Cornelius' heart, and he appropriated that word to himself. He said, ‘It is for me,’ and there were others with him, his household, his servants, all desirous to know the truth of God, and they found the same truth of God offered to them. “Whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.”

Beloved friends, I do earnestly beseech of you to consider upon what ground you are resting this night in this matter. Is it upon the word of God spoken directly to yourself? Have you at some point in your past history come to this position—that if God did not speak to you, if He did not dear away the doubts from your heart, no one else could, and then God in His word did come to you? Some particular text, some particular truth has flashed like a light from heaven to your soul, and you have known that God is for you. This knowledge God gives through His word. “We know” is the sincere language of faith. The man who believes the word of God is the man who knows it.

There are persons who affirm that it is presumption on man's part to say that his sins are forgiven. How can he know? Such knowledge would be in if God had not spoken. I do not think that we who rejoice in God's word, rejoice sufficiently in this fact, that God has spoken to us in this Book. Amid all the uncertainties of this time, and the great national struggle, causing men to wonder what lies beyond, oh! how we ought to thank God for that which never fails, His blessed, holy word! Here it is, as it was spoken of old. We have it now, in all its perfection, unchanged and unchangeable. It is for you and for me, but each heart must take hold of it.

I know that there are men who are proud of this book, that is, the book that is printed. They say there is no other book like it in the world. This is true. They say that it has made national history; but, beloved friends, there is another question, a deeper question than this, which it solves. Here am I, a responsible person, and where God has put me I have failed most miserably. I have despised God's precepts, and what is going to be the result of it? Is there not a word there for me, the erring and disobedient? It is very easy to speak of a Bible which is being sent forth to help and bless nations, and to bring men out of barbarism and into civilization. But, a man may say, ‘How about the sins of which I am guilty? God knows that I have despised His Son, and there are many sins I have committed, and I am responsible for them.’

Now this book speaks to the individual as the apostle Peter spoke to Cornelius. The word was for him, and, when received by him, the clouds dispersed, the doubts disappeared, and the man, gladdened by the sunshine of God's word, was a saved man in the full sense of the Scriptural term. To be saved, beloved friends, is not only to have the benefits procured by our Lord Jesus Christ, but to know that we have passed from death into life, and that whatever may come upon us, whatever may betide us in the future, all is well.

Have you observed the sequel to this preaching? The Spirit of God fell upon every person who was there, every man, every woman was sealed by the Holy Spirit. God thereby marked them out as His own, and they were subsequently baptized, and received into the company of

God's people. This was not the admission of Gentile believers into the place of God's ancient people here upon earth. On the contrary, it was a new thing; Jews and Gentiles are now one—equally believing in Him, equally accepted by Him, equally rejoicing in His name, and equally possessed of His great salvation.

Oh, beloved friends, I ask you whether you know for yourself the salvation of God. In order to do so you have to come, personally, individually, with your sins, to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not sufficient, however, to come to Him. It is necessary that you should continue in the attitude of expectation and entreaty until you meet God, and learn the truth about yourself on the authority of God's holy word. Do not trust a man like yourself. Do not trust a fellow mortal. Do not let anyone deceive you. Lay hold of God's word for yourself. A man, wittingly or unwittingly, may lead you astray. You can only trust One; that One is the Lord Jesus Christ. He speaks through this holy Book to you, and He who died for your sins, He who suffered for you on the tree, He is the One who says to you, "Thy sins are forgiven."

Let me say just one further word before parting. Some may have this difficulty which I will specify. And it is a difficulty which the more earnest Christian is not unlikely to have. There are many who start with a fervent determination that henceforward they will please Him at all costs, live for Him, shine for Him, be His good soldiers in this world. They seek to find from the Scripture what they must do, and everything seems joyous and happy and bright, and they can hardly believe the truth about themselves, they are so full of joy, and they are full of desire that everybody may be like them, just resting and trusting on the Lord Jesus Christ; and then something untoward happens. One day there is a disaster. From their mouths something comes which is so unexpectedly evil. They say, 'Surely, I cannot be a true disciple of Christ, or I should not have said or done this.' However, they try again, and find that a similar thing occurs before long, and they become very sorrowful and downcast, after vainly struggling again and again, and they have to confess themselves more prone to fall than they could have conceived. They know that they have done wrong. They say, 'Well, it is worse for me now than when I knew nothing of Christ. I know there is no love like His; He died for me, and, knowing that He died for me, I still go contrary to His will, and I do really what I do not want to do. I cannot seem to help myself.' And then they think they are lost after all, and are plunged into a gulf of darkness and despair. They felt when they came to the Lord, that their sins, and all the past, were obliterated, but now, after receiving the forgiveness of sins, they have gone wrong. What about that terrible disaster in their Christian pilgrimage? How about these sins? Satan says, 'Your sins are now very different from what they were once, for you now know His love and yet you have sinned against Him.' Satan says, There is no hope for you. The salvation is for the sinner who does not know God's will.'

Beloved friends, such a state is true of thousands. They are clear as daylight as to the sins they committed before their conversion, but stumbled because of present failure. But, remember, there is one Person who will deal with all your sins. This is the One who died for your sins. You will have to come to Him and confess your sins to Him. You will have to own, with shame, that, having known His love, you have despised it. And you will find that His love and forgiveness will come to you sweeter than ever. You will find that another word of His will come to you, and say that "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." "The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin."

Dear friends, the remission of sins is the Divine act which covers everything. 'Oh, but,' you say, 'my sin is after my conversion.' That is true, but when the Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross for your sins, God knew, not only what you would commit up to the time of your conversion, but He also knew what you would be after your conversion. It is a sad thing that you should be so weak and willful, and that after knowing His love, and tasting something of the sweetness of His salvation, such a grievous failure should be true of you; but there is the grave fact, which God knew before He sent out the sweet invitation of His love to you.

Therefore, beloved friends, if you are on the way to God, to that bright place above, and if your face is towards Him who died upon the cross, who is now there, the Lord Jesus Christ will receive you and forgive you in spite of all your failure, if you will but come to Him and believe in Him. The truth is just this. "Whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." It does not mean that we just believe on the Lord Jesus Christ one day in our history. There was a day when we first looked to the Lord Jesus Christ, a day of days in our history; but His gospel that we believe is to put away all doubts, once and forever. The terms are "Whosoever believeth," that is, yesterday, to-day, and throughout life. You have to continue to believe. You have to look in faith, and not to take your eyes away from Him, who is the Source of strength to those who conquer, and of forgiveness to those who fail.

I just leave this passage with you. "Whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." Is that word for you personally? Take it home to yourself, and in the light of God's holy presence, do you know, and are you certain, positive, within your own soul, that God therein speaks to you? It is no use looking at the matter from any other than a personal standpoint in order to get peace for your heart. You can rejoice over the conversion of other people, but first of all it must be realized in your own soul, and then, standing on redemption ground for yourself, you can rejoice with a deeper joy in the blessing, as it goes out to others. May God bless His word.

W.J.H.

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