

Colossians

Colossians 1: 15-29; Colossians 2: 1-23; Colossians 3: 1-11; Colossians 4: 7-18.

Reading with G. Davison

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Colossians 1: 13 refers to "the kingdom of His dear Son", and we emphasized at the close of our previous meeting that v.14 begins "**In** Whom we have redemption", not **by** Whom. This gives added weight to the glory of the Person as One great enough to bring in redemption for the glory of the Godhead, and secure the company which has been formed as a consequence. I mention this to show the connection with the verse we began with this afternoon, for we see how the sentence runs on, speaking now of the greatness and glory of the Son of God. It is Himself Who is brought before us in these verses. We can easily understand that only One Who is God can be the image of the invisible God. Apart from the revelation of God that He has given us, God must still have been invisible. In our readings on the Ark of the Covenant we were all affected by the fact that not only was the Ark overlaid with pure gold **without**, but it is first said that it was overlaid with pure gold **within**. There in type we have what we are trying to show is in this passage; because He is God, He made God known in His nature, attributes and disposition to the sons of men.

It was said of Adam that he was made in the image and likeness of God. I note that "likeness" is not said here about the Lord. What then is the meaning of this term "image"?

"Likeness of God" was said of Adam because he was not God. It is not said of Christ because He **is** God. Two thoughts are connected with the term "image" — presentation and representation. Adam represented God to the creation and ought to have presented God as well, so far as he could, being a creature; but Christ perfectly presented God when in the world in Manhood.

What had you in mind in the two words, presentation and representation?

In the first word, all that God is came to light in the Son of God. He shewed that God is love, that God is righteous, holy, merciful and gracious; but He also showed that God is a Saviour God and bent upon the blessing of His creature. That is what we meant by disposition, and in this way He presented God to the creation.

Every attribute and every moral feature of God were presented perfectly in that blessed Person. Yes!

Is that what we have in Hebrews 1: 3, "the express image of His Person"?

Yes! The word used there is different from the one used here for image, but the thought is much the same. The word there is "character", like the type used for printing. That is the meaning of the word. We have not seen the type from which our Bibles were printed but we know what it is like, exactly, by the impress before us. So it was with Christ, the exact impress of God, to use that term.

It is interesting to note in Hebrews 1, as here, that in the midst of many glories of the Son of God we read He made purgation for sins. You may remember that His accusers said, "Who can forgive sins but God?" It is one of the things that mark Him out in His Godhead, that He can bring in forgiveness of sins. Who dare say this on behalf of God but the One Who is God?

That is one of the rays of His glory, that this presentation of God has come in where God has been maligned by the incoming of sin, where the features of God, as seen in Adam, have been besmirched. Now we have had a blessed Person in the world in Whom that image has been perfectly expressed.

Then there is representation.

Yes, because in having to do with God now, we come to Him through Christ Who represents God to us. Moses represented God but he could not present Him. In all the dealings of Israel with God, they came to Moses. With us, we come to Christ. He is ever the point of contact between our souls and the Godhead, having presented the Godhead to us He also represents it.

This is including what we read of later, that in him all fullness was pleased to dwell.

Is this a parallel with John 1: 18, "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him"?

We have often heard in the meetings that there are three very similar chapters in the New Testament — John 1, Col. 1 and Heb. 1.

They all present the Godhead glory of the Son of God and some presentation of God manward.

Do they not all speak of His work on the cross?

Yes! That would throw emphasis on the word in v. 20, "His cross". The cross of such a One as this.

I think we are right in keeping that in mind as it is not so much the greatness of the work done which is before us in this epistle as the greatness of the Person Who has done it.

Not only do we read of His co-equality with God in this verse, but also of His perfection in Manhood. He is the "Firstborn of all creation" (v. 15. New Trans.).

The great teaching of this chapter as distinct from the others is — what He is doing here is for the pleasure of the Godhead.

Another point mentioned in all three chapters which have been referred to is, the reconciliation of all things. So we read here. He comes into Manhood to reconcile all things for the pleasure of the Godhead. He comes into Manhood to effect this and becomes in Manhood "the Firstborn of every creature".

If His work is to bring all things into reconciliation, then He must of necessity be above all things. He could not do this work were He inferior to, or even on a level with, all things. He must be above them to reconcile them.

Is "Firstborn of every creature" looking forward to the world to come?

It will, of course, be true then as now but this verse refers to what He was in Manhood in this world. From the moment He comes into Manhood, He takes the place of first in rank.

It is interesting to note that reconciliation is shown here to be more for the pleasure of God than for our blessing.

Yes! They are, of course, correlated. The One Who as Creator brings all into being for the pleasure of

the Godhead, as related in Genesis 1, is the same Person Who comes into Manhood to reconcile it, but because of Who He is when He does come into Manhood He takes the place of Firstborn, a term which means first in rank.

Seeing we have touched upon the truth of reconciliation, it is well to remark that it is spoken of in two ways here — of things and of persons; and I think it is well to see that the whole thing is for the pleasure of the Godhead. If the saints could see this, all the difficulties would be met.

There is a remarkable use of prepositions in v. 16, "For **by** Him were all things created . . . **by** Him, and **for** Him". They give us a clear view of the greatness of the Son. The first "by" indicates that He is the source of all creation, though we know that each Person in the Godhead is spoken of in relation to the original creating of the universe. Yet this second "by" means that the Son is the active instrumental Agent in bringing it into being. While all three Persons are associated in the creation, as the source of it the Son only is spoken of as the active instrumental Agent. Then, "for" means that in bringing it into being He did so having His own glory in view.

What a striking tribute that is to His deity.

Do we not get a similar thought in Rev. 4: 11, "for Thy pleasure they are and were created"?

Another place where an almost similar statement is made is in Rom. 11: 36, "For **of** Him, and **through** Him, and **to** Him . . .". A wider thought here no doubt. It has often been pointed out that when one of the Persons of the Godhead is singled out as being the Creator it is always the Son. The first "by" involves the Son standing in relation to the Father and the Spirit as source, but the second "by" means that He is the one Person in the Godhead Who actually brought it all into being.

In the chapters which have been quoted we have this very truth emphasized. In John 1 we read, "All things were made by Him" (v. 3). Literally, there was not anything came into being apart from Him; He created it all. The same thing is said in Heb. 1: 2.

Do not all the other glories of Christ mentioned later in the epistle flow out of that?

It gives character to all — that He is the Creator of all — for HIS Godhead glory underlies all the rest.

It says about those things He created, "in heaven and . . . in earth". In Phil. 2: 10 it adds, "things under the earth". Why is that statement not here?

"Things under the earth" is more a moral term than a material one. It is quite clear from Gen. 1: 1, that the creation of the heavens preceded the creation of the earth, including all things in both, but the things under the earth refer to infernal beings. It is a point to notice in regard to this that reconciliation begins from earth and reaches to heaven. In creation heaven is first, but in reconciliation earth is put first.

Does v. 16 include every force in the universe?

Yes! For nothing came into being apart from Him. These infernal beings were not infernal when He created them; they became that by rebellion.

Do we get the same two things in this verse? The earthly is put before the heavenly, thrones and dominions are earthly, while principalities and powers are heavenly.

Is it right to say that there are three things attributed to the Son — creation, redemption and judgment?

Quite. The great thought here is that He creates all; then, sin having come in, He comes into Manhood to reconcile all; and if we go on to Ephesians 1 we read He fills all things. It is, of course, true as well that all judgment is committed to the Son.

While things under the earth are not spoken of here in relation to reconciliation, let us rejoice that they all have to yield to the supremacy of the Lord as stated in Phil. 2. They will be subdued, not reconciled.

There is another Scripture which says that things under the earth will yet ascribe glory and honour to Him — Rev. 5: 13.

That is in line with Phil. 2, which has been quoted. They will be forced to ascribe this to Him.

Does not this term, "Firstborn", mean in rank, not in time?

The term is used of David in Ps. 89: 27, "Also I will make him My firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth".

The term "Firstborn" is used twice of Him in this chapter, v.15 and v.18. The first is absolute concerning Him, but the second is relative as there are other dead persons.

We must keep in mind that all this is said in relation to reconciliation. He must be pre-eminent to bring it all to pass. He is said to be before all things lest we might have thought that as the Firstborn He Himself was a product of creation. He was there before it all came into being, and He sustains it all. He did not only bring it in on behalf of the Godhead, but He also keeps it going.

Does this "by" (v. 17) mean the same as the second "by" in v. 16?

Yes! He actively keeps all going.

The word "all" is not defined in detail as it means everything — things in heaven, things on earth, all persons, everything. Moreover, He holds them together but He Himself is before all.

What does the reconciliation of all things mean?

Everything in heaven and on earth which has been marked by sin and used at times against God, will be brought back into the service of God by Christ. As mentioned earlier, the same Person Who created these things comes into Manhood to reconcile them and will yet use them all to fill the universe with the glory of God.

It will all be on the basis of redemption.

In Ephesians we read, "and gave Him to be the Head over all things to the church" (Eph. 1: 22). Does that include creation and the church?

It is the same "all things" which we have here, but He cannot control and use them for God until He reconciles them.

It is said in Ephesians that God has given Him to be Head, but here He is Head in the glory of His Own Person.

Yes! We must note, though, in Ephesians it is everything inclusive of the church, for He is Head over all things **to** the church, which is His body. His Headship there does not include the body. It does in Eph. 4 and also here but in Eph. 1 it is over all, to the church. I understand Eph. 1 to teach that He is going to use the church to take possession of all things with a view to filling them with the glory of God.

Coming back to our chapter, v. 18 teaches us that this wonderful Person Who created all things and keeps them all moving, is the "Head of the body, the church". The emphasis here is that we, the members of His body, are in touch with this supreme Person. If there is one Person great enough to keep us moving here for the pleasure of God, this is He. We do well to get hold of this.

What is involved in this term, "Firstborn from the dead"?

Coming into Manhood as we read in v. 15, He was "Firstborn" because of Who He is, but He left this world and the sphere of responsible Manhood by death. Coming forth again in resurrection He opens out a new sphere for the glory of God and in this new system He is again said to be "Firstborn". He must be that because of Who He is.

That is why "Firstborn from among the dead" (New Trans.) is preceded by "Who is the beginning".

What does that mean — "the beginning"?

The beginning of **all things**. It is purposely left as an abstract statement to show the greatness of the Person. It is not Himself in relation to anything in particular — He is the beginning.

I suppose it is in line with Gen. 1, "In the beginning", and yet, of course, more than that for He is the beginning of all things, whether in creation or redemption.

In Gen. 1 it is a question of time, and He was before time, but here it is a Person Who Himself embodies the beginning. Nothing was begun without Him for He commenced everything. I think it is a tribute to His Own Person, not quite related to anything. As stated, He closed up the sphere of responsibility and brought a new condition of things to light and He is the beginning. The One Who has power to bring all things into being now brings in this new order.

There can be no doubt that Christ is the beginning of new creation, but if we add new creation to this statement we are going to lose something for He is the beginning of everything that has begun for the will of God. Neither angels nor men ever began anything; all was originated by Christ. We can only lay hold of things that have been brought into being, we cannot begin them.

We read that He is the "Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last" (Rev. 22: 13).

That is of interest as the end is of as much importance as the beginning. The One Who began all is the only One Who can end all when it has served its purpose. He brought in this universe and will yet use it for a thousand years to fill it all with the glory of God. What then? He will bring it to an end and bring in a new heaven and a new earth.

That is interesting. No one else can bring it into being, no one else can control it and no one else can end it but He.

Why is the body brought in here?

The truth of the body is one of the main thoughts in this epistle. The Colossians may have been losing sight of the magnitude of what they had been brought into, so the apostle is being used to remind them of this in these statements. If such a Person is Head of the body and I, as a member of that body, am in communion with Him, why should I look to any one else for help or guidance? It is all in this wonderful Person, and available for us all.

What is the distinction between the body and the church?

I judge the church is a parent thought, it is composed of course of all believers today. In the first epistle to Timothy the church is said to be the house of God. In Ephesians and Revelation it is said to be the wife and bride of Christ; and here as well as in other places it is said to be the body. Taking them all together we have the various functions of the church described for us.

What is the outstanding feature of the body here?

The display of the Head.

He is not only Head **to** the body but, as stated here, Head **of** the body.

It is as the Head of the body that He is said here to be the beginning. Is that philosopher, then, going to tell me something which He cannot tell me? The Head of the body is the beginning of everything.

What is the good of having something which is subsequent to Christ? Why not go to the source? If He is the beginning everything must be subsequent to Him.

It may interest some to point out that in Proverbs 8 and 9 we have this word "beginning" three times, and each occurrence is distinct from the others. "The LORD possessed me in the beginning of His way" (Prov. 8: 22); there it is a word translated in other places "firstfruits". "I was set up . . . from the beginning" (Prov. 8: 23); here it is a word which means "the outset". "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov. 9: 10); that word means "the first time". An analytical concordance will show this. It is remarkable that when it applies to us, "first time" is the thought; it may not be the **only** time. But this word is not used of Christ, He was the "firstfruits" and was there at "the outset". Ch. 8 runs very close to this epistle as we see Christ there the beginning of the heavens, the seas, and the earth, in this order. You will remember in Gen. 1, the order is heaven, sea and earth, so it is in Proverbs; but we quote from there in line with this thought. He is the beginning of all. He brought it all into being. Suppose I give my life to the study of astronomy, I may acquire a tremendous knowledge of the subject, but I should be a long way beneath what I can be as a member of the body of Christ.

We can understand then, that whether before the cross in His movements here, or after the cross in the new sphere in resurrection, He must be pre-eminent.

The New Translation renders it, "That He might have the first place in all things". We must remember that "firstborn" is a relative term, as was said, but in every sphere in which He stands, He must have the first place. In Romans 8: 29 we read, "that He might be the Firstborn among many brethren". Then we are told, "it pleased . . . that in Him should all fulness dwell". Here it is in the past tense as true of Him when in this world; the Father and the Spirit dwelt in Him.

Would that convey that the pleasure of the Godhead was bound up with the Son being here in Manhood?

The Godhead is heard in unity in the creation of man in Gen. 1, "Let us make man". While we have seen that the Son was the active Agent in bringing the creation into being, yet He does it in conjunction with the Father and the Spirit. The word "us" is in the plural in the Hebrew language, which involves three; it could not be two for this is indicated by the dual; so that the whole of the Godhead was involved in that mighty transaction. Is it not a remarkable tribute to this Person that all the fullness dwelt in Him? The whole of the Godhead in revelation has been seen in that blessed Man.

It comes to light in a way that we can take knowledge of at the banks of the Jordan, the voice of the Father, the descent of the Spirit, and the Son in Manhood. J.N.D. said about it — The Father was there in testimony, the Spirit was there in power and the Son was there in Person.

In v. 20 we come to the thought of reconciliation and now we see that the One Who brought the creation into being for the pleasure of the Godhead comes into Manhood to reconcile it for the pleasure of the Godhead.

I note it is the same expression, "by Him".

He made peace through the blood of His cross. Again it is abstract; it does not say He made peace for

us, but He made peace and reconciles all things to "Itself" i.e. the Godhead, so it should read. As said before, in reconciliation things on earth take precedence over the things in heaven. It will not be seen in its totality till the end of the world to come. We must keep clear all the same, that for a thousand years all things in heaven and in earth will be in the hands of the One Who reconciles them all, and He will fill them with the glory of God. Finally, the beings who had defiled these things and at times used them in opposition to God will be cast into the lake of fire.

It is the created heavens you are speaking about?

Yes! not the beings who inhabit them. Unfallen angels do not need reconciliation; fallen angels will never have it; it is fallen men who have been reconciled.

The elders in heaven are saying glory and honour to Him Who created all things (Rev. 4: 10, 11). That would be at the beginning of the world to come.

Reconciliation has begun on earth so far as we are concerned, but it has to wait till the kingdom before the "things" are brought into it.

When you say the world to come, do you mean the kingdom?

Yes! it is coincident with the thousand years reign in the kingdom. The "things" will be brought into reconciliation by ruthlessly expelling the persons who have used these things in opposition to God. I do not doubt that, as reference has been made to Eph. 1, the members of His body will be put into these spheres and so all will be held for the pleasure of the Godhead throughout the administration of the kingdom. In that way and at that time the "things" will be seen publicly as in reconciliation to the Godhead. Christ will be in control, the glory of God will fill all, and the whole universe will resound with the praise of God. What we learn here is that Christ will bring it all to pass — He Who is the great Head of the body.

Colossians 1: 23-29

Following the truth of reconciliation which we looked into yesterday, we come now to what we might call a test for the Colossians. It was stated that, although we have an "if" here, we do continue if we really are saints, but it is as well to consider this exhortation lest there may be in any one an attachment to the circle and not to the Son of God. It is stated earlier in this chapter that they had faith in the glad tidings and this had brought them into Christianity; this would assure us that they did stand in the good of reconciliation with God.

Would you say something about the "hope of the gospel"? It would assure our hearts today that we have not been moved away from it.

We have already considered the "hope which is laid up for you in heaven" (v. 5); this they also heard of in the truth of the gospel. Here it is connected with the mystery mentioned in verse 27, "Christ in you, the hope of glory". We have to realize that the Spirit of God dwells in our souls and gives us light as to these things preparatory to our entering into the place to which they belong; that is, to be glorified with Christ above. Hope does not mean something indefinite, as men use the term, but a certainty which gives us hope.

In Hebrews 6, we read, "Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast" (v. 19).

Yes, that is the kind of hope. There are no doubts whatever connected with it.

Is there the thought here of some giving up the gospel?

It does seem as though that was so. That is why we said there may have been some attached to the company who were not attached to Christ. We know that no one attached to Christ by the Spirit could possibly give up, but some may have been attached to the company only and consequently have been turned aside. We must regard this warning. It has been pointed out that only in the epistle to the Ephesians are there no "ifs". The evidence of being real is that we continue.

Although we read at the close of the gospel of Matthew that our Lord gave His disciples authority to preach the gospel to all nations, Paul says here, "to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister" (v. 23). We may well ask why he speaks of himself in this way in the light of what the Lord said to the twelve. Have we not learned that what Paul was the minister of to the Gentiles was not the same as that which the twelve were commissioned to preach? That was the gospel of the kingdom of heaven. To Paul was given the gospel of the glory, and while this means the greatest blessing that God has in view for the sons of men, it is for every creature under heaven.

I understand the article "a" before minister should not be there. It is not that he was one of many but he, specially, was "made minister". Would not his exhortation not to be moved away also have in view that they should go on to the realization of the truth of the calling? There may be an attachment to the gospel without a going on to what the gospel has in view, the laying hold upon this hope.

Would not Demas be an example of one who moved away?

It does not say that he left Christianity but he did leave the Pauline teaching. The fact that there is no article before this word "minister" stamps it as being something very special — Paul's gospel. Is it not a great fault that Christendom has moved away from the peculiar characteristics of Paul's gospel? It is important that we do not skip over this verse, while assured that every true believer will go on; but are we all seeking to go on to the full scope of the gospel of the glory, or are we content with the gospel as bringing only relief to us?

Is it not true that while Balaam could not curse the people of God, he gave them something which attracted them away from God and their testimony for God? While it is true that every believer will certainly land in glory, do we not have this teaching for present enjoyment?

It is a very significant fact that as soon as the apostle has brought in this exhortation to fully follow the thought of God in the gospel, he mentions the matter of suffering (v. 24).

This is a peculiar verse to understand. He speaks of "sufferings for you", and filling up "that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body's sake, which is the church". I apprehend this verse means that whatever has been introduced into this world concerning Christ, Satan has opposed it. As he opposed Christ when He was in this world, now that Christ is in glory and forming this body which is going to subsist in attachment to Himself, Satan is going to persecute it. That is why he so intently persecutes the apostle who brings out this truth of the church. He could no longer persecute Christ Who is in the glory, so he persecutes the vessel which is bringing out this ministry.

Does it not show how very precious this ministry was to the heart of the apostle that he could rejoice in these sufferings? Here is a man who had committed to him the most remarkable ministry, involving the most intense suffering, but the ministry was so precious in his sight and so essential for the practical salvation of the saints, that he personally would rejoice in all the sufferings which it involved. This is a beautiful principle.

This is in sharp contrast with Peter, as recorded in Matthew 16. As soon as he is given the keys of the kingdom and told the Lord was to die, he said "Be it far from Thee, Lord". Evidently this mind to suffer is very important.

In regard to the practical salvation of the saints, to which you call attention, Paul says in 2 Tim. 2: 10, "Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory".

He had been prepared for this at the outset of his commission, for the Lord had said, "I will shew him how great things he must suffer for My Name's sake" (Acts 9: 16). Is this peculiar to him?

I do not doubt that the other apostles suffered in relation to the glad tidings, as we read in the beginning of the Acts. "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3: 12).

How many of us are prepared to suffer for the saints? Paul not only prayed for the saints; he was prepared to suffer for them. It has often been pointed out that Christianity has been established upon sacrifice, and I doubt if we make real progress in the deep things of God apart from sacrifice. How much am I prepared to suffer for the saints?

One of the outstanding truths in this epistle is the Body which is the Assembly. It is a deepening appreciation of what the saints are to Christ which will enable us to suffer, and to rejoice in suffering to see Christ formed in them.

Why does he speak of these sufferings as a filling up? Does it suggest there was not a completeness of these without the apostle?

This body which is being formed is so contrary to the world, and we may say, so contrary to what Satan was doing in the world, that it might have been doubtful whether it was right had Satan not persecuted it. Paul says, as it were, I minister it on the one hand and am prepared to suffer for it on the other, for suffering is bound to come; and he accepted it with joyfulness.

Were there many in the good of this truth in what we speak of as the dark ages?

Indeed yes, for how many there were who suffered!

Do we not get the first touch of the truth contained in this verse on the Damascus road? He heard that voice say, "Why persecutest thou Me?"

It is certainly the body that is in view there..

We ought to keep clear, whatever the general implications may be, that these sufferings were special to him as minister of this truth. Nevertheless, if we pursue this truth in our day, and move in relation to it, persecution more or less will be our part.

Ere we leave this verse, why is it stated that they are "the tribulations of Christ"? (New Trans.)

The reference to the words of our Lord on the Damascus road gives us the secret. "Why persecutest thou Me?" This body is so identified with Christ that it is the counterpart of Christ in testimony today, and will be used to display Christ in the world to come. What Satan is persecuting is Christ in the saints. They are thus the afflictions of Christ.

We have often said Satan has nothing against us as men but if we have the savour of the anointed vessel, which is what "the Christ" indicates, that is another matter (see footnote to v. 24 in the New Trans.). It is recorded of Amalek that he put his hand on the throne of Jah. I do not think for one moment that he could stretch his hand up to God; he cannot touch anything there but (in type) he can put his hand upon the rights of God in our hearts.

In v. 25, Paul says of himself he was "made minister", a word which indicates "waiter". Paul as a waiter ministered this truth for the enlightenment of the saints. Again in the verse, this word "dispensation"

means "**houselaw**" — the house-law of God which was given to him to complete the divine revelation. Prophecy had long been given; the kingdom had been announced; the sufferings of Christ and the glory of that kingdom were in the Old Testament. It is the scope of the revelation that is in view and the last thing to come out which completes that scope is the truth of the mystery. We can be sure, if it is the last thing God made known, that it is the greatest thing, for it is the centre from which all the rest will be put in order.

There is a footnote to the word "complete" in the New Translation. It is not to complete another thing by adding to it but to fill up a system already sketched out. The idea of fresh light and that sort of thing is completely ruled out. This would be in view of the danger in Colossians 2, where some would add to the revelation. If this is the completion of the matter, no more needs to be said.

It is clear from v. 26 that he is referring to the mystery. Someone has said it is the key stone to the arch. Was this not hid in God till made known to the apostle?

It says it was "hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints". Is not that something fresh then?

We have said before that God had been speaking by the prophets to the fathers; truth was beginning to be unfolded, but the last great disclosure God has made in the scope of truth is the revelation of the mystery.

That will be why there is no quotation from the Old Testament in the epistle. It is not the completing of a prophetic word given before but a new divine revelation that never was known before.

It is said of this mystery elsewhere, that silence was kept in relation to it. It was there, but silence was kept about it.

It was not revealed to Paul only; it was revealed to all the holy apostles. What is said here is, he was the particular minister of it.

Would it not be well to describe this mystery lest it should remain a mystery to some?

It is described for us in the next verse, "Christ in you, the hope of glory".

Do you think this is quite as extensive as the expression in Colossians 2?

Yes! that is the mystery, the same mystery as here, spoken of by another term. There it is said to be the mystery of God, but here it is on our side, "Christ in you".

What about the Ephesian aspect of it?

There are many details that we may trace out in connection with it but it is definitely said here to be "Christ in you, the hope of glory". You may add a few more details about it from other places, and I would quite go with them but that is what the mystery is as spoken of here.

Does not the mystery include two thoughts — a Man at God's right hand and, Christ in you, the hope of glory?

It does, but it is the same mystery. One is the complement of the other, it must be so of necessity. There could not be "Christ in you" unless there is a Man at the right hand of God. This is the setting forth of an entirely new order involving a Man there, and that Man in His features and characteristics can be formed in each; that is the mystery.

It has been pointed out that in Ephesians the main thought is "in Christ ", but in Colossians it is more

"Christ in you". These are two sides of the same thing. If we do not see that, we are going to make out there are two or three mysteries, but in the Pauline gospel there is only one mystery.

Scripture does not refer to the same thing every time we read of a mystery, for example in 1 Cor. 15, "Behold I show you a mystery". It may be as well to point that out.

Quite so, that is why we said the mystery of the Pauline gospel.

The fact that a ministry is given in relation to this mystery prove it is not mysterious, for this is something which has been made known. It is a revelation.

It is still a mystery in this way, that only those who are initiated into it by the Spirit can understand it. So it says, "Now is made manifest to His saints".

Does it help to note that in Rev. 10, it says "the mystery of God should be finished"?

This mystery in Colossians is not the same mystery as in Rev. 10. That has to do with the ways of God on earth, but this is connected with the heavenly company and is more connected with the counsel of God. In Revelation it is the mystery of why God has allowed all the bloodshed on earth; why He has allowed His people to be persecuted and why He allows us to suffer. All is going to be seen in light in that day, but here it is the hidden thought of God concerning the Church. I agree that the mystery of God may be more comprehensive in its details, but there is only one mystery when Christ and the Church are in view, that is what I am trying to keep clear.

The riches of the glory of this mystery ought to be of interest to us. Paul says concerning this, "Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom".

That verges on the twofold ministry of Paul, the ministry of the gospel and the ministry of the mystery. I suppose it was the ministry of the gospel when he brought the glad tidings to them, but he not only warned every man, he also taught every man. It was said yesterday that the gospel never has its full effect upon us till we learn our attachment to Christ, and that is the effect of the teaching.

Why does he say of the mystery, "Christ in you"?

I do not suppose that was the first time they had heard that, but apparently they had not yet fully taken it in. We have seen the build up in this chapter, beginning with the "invisible God" and all that follows concerning Christ, and now have to learn that this wonderful Person is dwelling in the heart of every one of the saints today, even Gentiles. It follows that we all have a link with Christ in glory that is going to abide and is the pledge that one day we shall be with Him above. With that knowledge in our souls the practical effect is that we lose interest in man's world. That is the practical part of Colossians 3, seeking the things which are above.

The truth of the mystery is that God has persons here now, in the very place where Christ has been crucified, in whom the living characteristics of Christ are coming out, and that above all in the Gentiles who never had a link with God at all. We do not see anything greater than this, and this is the mystery.

We might have said earlier that Colossians presents the mystery in its present character today, while Ephesians has more in view the world to come. Jew and Gentile formed into one body has display in the world to come in view according to Colossians 3, but the character of the mystery here is that Christ is in the saints now and coming out in testimony.

That is what I have in mind, that God has now in this scene that which is the "Me" of Acts 9: 4, called to live as Christ would live, every feature of that blessed Man reproduced in the lives of the saints here. It is a mystery to the world, but thank God it is made manifest to the saints and we know that we are in

it.

We do not take these words in any extravagant meaning at all — "the riches of the glory". To think that God has the very best for rebels such as we were, bringing us into association with Himself as being here in this world with Christ dwelling in us, the hope of glory!

What I connect with the riches of the glory is that God is so delighted with Christ, and always has been. In eternity past, "Thou lovest Me before the foundation of the world". When here, He was manifested as the Son of His love. Now He is cast out of the world but says, as it were, I have a people in whom are reproduced the features of that One Who has delighted My heart for ever. This is the mystery.

It is a mystery, I suppose, because God had this in mind before ever the world was, but He could not disclose it till He had Christ in glory. The mystery involves a Man in heaven and God on earth — the characteristics of this dispensation. It is peculiar to this dispensation too, and the mystery was not made known until these two facts were established.

So we are a privileged people.

Yes, it involves being full grown in Christ Jesus, as the word "perfect" indicates. This is the light which governs us, and that is why I pointed out the word is house-law, the real meaning of this dispensation. There was a time when the house-law consisted of meats and drinks; separation from Gentiles, etc.; but that is not the house-law today. The house-law today is the mystery; that is the governing thing which has to control us, the ministration of Christ and the manifestation of Christ here in this world today.

Why is verse 28 in the singular?

Did you mean teaching **every man**?

Yes, and presenting **every man**.

Well, I cannot grow for you. It is there for each one of us. It has been rightly said — no one can put truth into anyone's soul. If some of us have been graciously helped to open up the word a little for the enlightenment of others, we cannot put it into any soul; only the Holy Spirit can do that.

It has been pointed out that in a babe all the faculties are there but they need to be developed. Now God has put the faculties in the saints, no one else can do that, but we may by our simple ministry help to develop those faculties. So that the suffering of v. 24 goes on to combat in v. 29.

What is this presentation?

Fully grown in the truth today. How often people say, "We shall never be perfect in this world", whereas there are many Scriptures which say we ought to be, and here is one of them. No doubt what they have in mind is sinlessness, and we shall never reach that till we are glorified; but perfection in this chapter means full growth to maturity. We ought to have that in mind in every little service we take up, to present the saints in that way.

Every faculty in exercise.

Very good. As our brother has said, all the faculties are there but they need developing and using in exercise.

Venturing on a free translation of this verse, it may be, "agonizing, according to His energy, which worketh in me effectually". So far as I can see, that is the meaning of these words. Agonizing for the saints in the work which God had given him to do; supplied with divine energy to do it, and thanking God that it had been made effective.

So that the effect of the gospel brings us into the Assembly, and we have teaching there to bring us to perfection.

What would be the gain of coming to meetings like this if we were not desirous of growing in the truth? It is grand for us to reach out to maturity. Surely no one would like to think he had no more knowledge now than when he was five years old! Well, how long have we been in the meetings? How much more do we know of these things than when first we came along? How much more capable are we of using them? That is the perfection in view here.

It took Jacob twenty years to add El to Beth-El.

The reason for that was, he was in a sphere where they would not put the second before the first. Laban said it was not the custom of that land to put the second before the first and until we see that God has put the Second Man before the first, and we do so, we shall not make progress in these truths.

Colossians 2: 1-12

It was remarked at the close of the reading on chapter 1 that the mystery in Colossians is said to be "Christ in you, the hope of glory", as having a present effect in the reproduction of the features of Christ in the Gentiles. This gives us a link with where we begin today. We noticed that the mystery was not presented here as it is in Ephesians, where it involves the body composed of Jew and Gentile, and having display in the world to come in view. Here it is what is operative now amongst the Gentiles, and that helps us to see why in this chapter we have a succession of warnings against the things which would hinder the reproduction of features of Christ in the saints today. The chapter opens with an account of the conflict — agony, as the word means -which the apostle endured as he thought of Laodicea as well as of those Colossian saints. He feared lest the ministry he was called of God to give to them was not working out as it should do in these companies, and he agonized in prayer for them that they might stand in the power of it.

Are we to agonize in the same way?

It would be this to which the apostle alludes in 2 Cor. 11, "the care of all the churches", and I think it ought to mark all who are called in any way to minister the truth; there ought to be deep exercise that what is ministered is made good in the hearts and the lives of the saints.

This is more than doctrine — our daily devotion enters into it. The more I love the Lord, the more He is precious to me, so much the more shall I agonize that features of Himself might be displayed in the saints. While one would desire to present these things in order, so that the saints might grasp them in their minds, I would also be concerned in prayer that the affections of the saints might be stirred. I do feel that this is something more than teaching; it involves intimacy with Christ, and an appreciation of His Person and His love. One would desire that such things should have a living place formatively in the hearts of the saints, and to agonize for them that this might be so is one of the highest services we can engage in.

It is the affections of the saints the apostle had in view when he says, "That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love".

I am impressed with the fact that the combat here stands related to the features of Christ being reproduced **now** — not in the world to come. That is the whole point in this epistle.

There will not be any need of combat in the world to come, for Christ will be displayed in glory in all the saints. The amazing thing is that we are called by the grace of God, enlightened and empowered, to

manifest now those features which came out in Christ.

The Holy Spirit would effect this in the saints. It seems as though the saints at Colosse did not know what the apostle was passing through on their account, and the saints today may not know how much of this marks those who minister the truth to them.

We have noticed already in this epistle how that which specially concerned the apostle is brought before us, yet these principles ought to be true of us all. The apostle desired that the word should go deeper than their minds when he said — "That their hearts might be comforted".

I suppose the one thing which is going to produce this is "the full knowledge of the mystery of God", as it is in the New Translation. Assurance, connected with "full knowledge". The danger is in thinking that this is something difficult of understanding, yet it is the very thing which is going to bind the saints together and bring to light that united reproduction of Christ which is in view in these chapters.

Why did you say a united reproduction?

Would not that statement "their hearts . . . knit together" have this in view? It means that we have each an individual appreciation of this and move together. It is wonderful to see a company diverse in social standing, intellectual attainments, etc., yet moving and held together. Only truth like this will produce such an effect. Can anything draw me to a brother or sister more than his or her desire to be here like Christ? It draws out my affections to them at once.

Would there be a moral order here? Comforted; knit together; full assurance of understanding. It seems to me the comfort and being knit together lead to the full assurance.

This word "assurance" would indicate that as we go on with this truth we get so thoroughly established in these things that we are not moved away by other things. We have assurance.

Can you say what it was that caused Laodicea to miss all this?

I can only think they had fallen victims to the very things from which the Colossians were preserved — that is, if they **were** preserved from them. Maybe the Laodiceans had disregarded these warnings. If we go in for philosophy, vain deceit, and the wisdom of men, we shall soon be so filled with that sort of thing that Christ will be left outside. There is no room for the Head in that.

Is it in your mind to say a little more about "the mystery of God"? If so, why, according to the New Translation, is "of the Father and of Christ" omitted?

I suppose, first, it is a matter for the translators to judge whether it ought to be there or not. Yet it is called in Colossians 4, "the mystery of Christ". As we said yesterday, there is only one mystery whatever name is given to it according to the particular aspect in each place in which reference to it is made. It is the mystery which was given to Paul and came directly to him from God.

We may well seek that this mystery might be unlocked to us, for in it we read are "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge".

If we are established in the truth of the "mystery" we have the key which unlocks the revelation God has given to us of His thoughts. We do not want to stop short of this, but seek to grasp it in its entirety; for it is the kernel of the ways of God, the kernel of the counsel of God, and in it we have the key to unlock all the treasures of God in the unfolding of the Divine revelation to our souls. I do not doubt the Assembly is the secret of it all.

Having spoken of the importance of the truth of the mystery, he now warns the saints lest they might be distracted from the power of it. He begins to point out to them in v. 4 that many delusions were around

to which they might fall victims unless fully established in the truth of the mystery. One often has the experience of being asked, "What do you think of this?" or, "Do you think that is right?", and one cannot help but think that had the saints been more fully established in the truth of the mystery they would not have had any difficulty with the delusions. If we are not going in for this truth we may fall a prey to all sorts of wrong things.

When Paul went to Corinth, he carefully kept away from the very things he speaks of as dangers to these Colossians. The same words are used there — "persuasive speech" — but Paul did not use this. We need to be clear in our minds between true gift and persuasive speech. It is not what a brother may say in persuasive speech but what he brings of the glorified Man, Christ Jesus.

What did you say about "full knowledge"?

That we do not want to stop short of it in its entirety. Some have striven all their lives to know more and more of these great matters. Often sleep has been sacrificed when men have wrestled with divine problems, determined to know them at all cost.

It is recorded of J.N.D. that he gave three days to prayer and fasting seeking to understand that verse, "greater works than these shall he do".

It is obvious that the apostle recognizes the seriousness of this attack. They had not yet slipped, for he speaks of the firmness of their faith. It must have been a pretty serious attack which he recognized as setting itself against those who were marked by firmness of faith, not those who were slack. Yet that opposition was sufficient to overthrow them if they were not on their guard.

It does seem that if we have not this knowledge we are not going to unlock many parts of the truth of God. Some are rather disposed to opening out the typical system in the Old Testament, but we must be firmly established here if we are to see it all in relation to Christ and the working out of the counsel of God. Ephesians no doubt goes beyond this, for we are told there the counsel of God is to head up **all things** in Christ, but we must know this aspect of the mystery in order to unlock other secrets and to safeguard ourselves from being turned aside by delusions. By the grace of God these precious secrets are all available to us.

It is stated in the first chapter that God would make known what are the riches of this mystery, for had God not made it known there would not have been this combat that the saints might know it. Paul was not beating the air; it was known, and he labored that the saints might know it.

"As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord" would be when they had believed the gospel, but having thus believed on Him, confessing Him as Lord, it is now a question of going on in Him — "walk ye in Him". When first we came to Christ we came to Him as the only One in the universe Who could meet our need, and He did. Well, He is the only One Who can meet our need in working this out in our lives for the pleasure of God. "Walk ye in Him: rooted and built up in Him". We need not be disconcerted if we are not far on in the philosophies of this world, but let us be exercised to be rooted and built up in Him. "Rooted" means we can grow there, drawing all our resources from Him. "Built up" means we are established in the truth.

"Rooted", while something that **has** been done, in its effect continues. "Built up" is a continuous thing now going on, but "rooted" also means we continue in that condition. We are not uprooted. One has connected "rooted" with fruit bearing, that which is for the pleasure of God; "built up" with the house of God, which is testimony.

What had the apostle in mind when he wrote "beholding your order" (v. 5)?

Would it not be that they were walking subject to the truth they had received? Paul had said the ministry he had was working in him effectually, and I judge it was working effectually in the saints, but he feared lest that effect might be spoiled. It is not said they had lost this, but he was afraid they might lose it, for some danger was apparently surrounding them.

The order would stand out in sharp contrast to that of the Corinthian saints, where much disorder prevailed, and their faith would stand out in contrast to the Galatian saints, who were slipping away from faith.

What we have been saying gives point to the emphatic "you" of J.N.D. in v. 8. It was such persons as these who were in danger of being carried away. J.N.D. has a note that there was not merely a possibility but a real danger of such persons as these being carried away. We do not want to underestimate the power that is set against saints who are characteristically like Christ. We may be assured that the effort of the devil does not stand in relation to our eternal salvation, for he knows that is assured, but what he is set against and what he can prevent is the moral features of Christ coming out in the saints **now**. That is a **real danger**, not a mere possibility, and we do well to face it. Here were established saints, firm in the faith, going on as they had been taught, having accepted Christ Jesus as Lord, and yet even with such there was the imminent danger that if they did not hold fast the Head, they might fail in this representation of Christ.

"Beware lest any man spoil you". It means "make a prey of you". Something like a captured animal, unable to move in the sphere where one could normally move; out of one's environment, and all through philosophy and vain or empty deceit — nothing in it at all.

Satan would use men and elements of the world, but what he cannot use is that which is according to Christ. "According to Christ" is the standard. Is it according to God's anointed Man?

The things of verse 8 do not carry us one step out of man's world. We know how quite a lot of these things are detailed in other epistles.

Was there a danger of this marking them?

There may have been those in the Assembly there who were active in these things. There was love, faith, hope, and the truth, and a firm standing in what they had been taught. The danger was of their being moved away from that, and then these things would be found within. Evidently we have to admit there is that within each one of us which would answer to these attacks from without, and they would soon get in if we did not hold fast the Head. That is the only salvation. If we are holding fast the Head we shall receive nourishment from the Head and the influence of the Head will control us.

There is so much that is according to Christ to occupy us for time and eternity, so why should we turn to these other things? The fulness of the Godhead is in Christ and it is not worth while being occupied with anything else.

It has been a wonderful experience to some of us, in passing through this world, to notice many things going on there which do not interest one at all. It is a good exercise to examine oneself as to whether one was beginning to show interest in them. They ought not to attract us.

It is not only that they do not interest us but what a danger there is in touching them. We may as well warn ourselves that there is positive danger in touching the philosophy, politics, wisdom and religions of this world. They are not according to Christ, and that is the simple standard. He is outside of them all. We need to take notice of this word, "**Beware**".

We reach now one of those very comprehensive statements about the Personal greatness and glory of

Christ, "For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily". What room is there here for the elements of this world? We noted in Col. 1: 19, that the word "Godhead" is not in the text, and also that "Father" is in italics; it is merely "all fulness was pleased to dwell"; but we are assured that here it is the "fulness of the Godhead". This word, as most of us will know, is used only in this single place in Scripture. We might have understood the "fulness of the Godhead" as seen in Christ when in this world in testimony for God. It was there in view of reconciliation for the pleasure of the Godhead, as we noted, but here it is stated of Him as in Manhood in glory; and this time, not so much for testimony, or to effect reconciliation which He has done perfectly for the pleasure of the Godhead, but to keep simple saints like us here for the pleasure of God. How wonderful, is it not?

Would that verse in John 1: 16, "and of His fulness have all we received" come in here?

I hardly think so, for preceding that statement it says "full of grace and truth". That was the resource that was in Him to meet our need. The truth enlightens us concerning God; grace meets us in our need; it is of that fulness we have received, it is dwelling in Him; but what we do receive from the One in Whom that fulness dwells is all the support we need to move here for the pleasure of God.

This fulness, though in Him, is there in regard to us. What you have just said is very important and encouraging, that the fulness of the Godhead dwelling bodily in that blessed Man in heaven is available to enable me to be here according to the divine mind.

We can see then the necessity of the addition of this word "bodily". The fulness must be toward us in that blessed Man. It is of course an assertion that Christ is still in Manhood in a glorified body in the presence of God. Not merely a spirit, but in bodily form He is glorified in the presence of God.

What is meant by the word "dwelleth"?

The fulness of the Godhead is there to stay and to be available for us at all times.

Does it carry also the thought that it is complacent there, it is at home there? What a blessed Person He must be in Whom this fulness is at home.

It adds here "And ye are complete in Him which is the Head of all principality and power". It does not say "head of the body" — why is this?

I think we see this worked out somewhat further down the chapter. They may have been turning to these principalities and powers, so the apostle is warning them that Christ is the Head of these beings. They are all subordinate to Him.

When He is spoken of as the "Head of all principalities and powers" is it to show the difference between this and "the Head of the body"? The members of the body are united to Him, these beings are not.

No doubt. If there is anything in these principalities and powers that can be of help to me (for I suppose the unfallen angels are at His disposal) the Head will direct them to help me, but if I pray to angels on my own account they will not help me at all. He controls them all on my account.

All this seems to be heading up to the statement "holding the Head". Is it not true that in His headship we can go direct to Him? We do not need any intermediary, but receive direct from His hand. All wisdom, all nourishment comes from Him and as the supreme One we can go direct to Him.

The word "complete", in v. 10, is the word "fulness" in v. 9. "All the fulness" dwells in Him bodily and we are filled full in Him. It involves both His Godhead and His Manhood, if we are to be in touch with Him.

Is there any difference between being filled full in Him and being filled full by Him?

Do you mean we are potentially filled full in Him by appointment but filled full by Him when we lay hold of these resources? Yes! indeed, it is one thing for us to read that it is true for us in Him, but another thing for us to be laying hold of that, going on with it in practice.

There is another fulness mentioned at the end of Eph. 3, "filled with all the fulness of God". That is often placed alongside the fulness here, but I judge the two are distinct. I have come to the conclusion that the fulness in Eph. 3 is the fulness of the divine revelation which is going to be displayed in the world to come, called in Eph. 1, "the fulness of Him that filleth all in all". I do not think it is the fulness of Godhead there. The Assembly is being formed as a vessel to contain that fulness in view of display, but I am sure this fulness of Godhead will never dwell in the Assembly. It is in the One Who dwells in the Assembly and is available today to enable the saints to function for God. I do think there is a distinction between the two statements and what each involves.

It is a definite statement, "ye are complete in Him". That is true from the Divine side and is true of every saint; but as observed, we need to lay hold upon it.

It is there for the company but it is true we do not touch these things in the company unless we touch them individually. We must note that the company is in mind, it is the body, saints knit together in this hostile world showing the moral features of Christ in testimony. And this is one of the resources we have to enable us for this — that the One in Whom all the fulness of the Godhead is dwelling bodily will maintain us. We need not go outside of Him at all.

There are three things connected with the Headship of Christ — direction, control and nourishment. Here it is the thought of control, "Head of all principality and power". How grand to be under His control, that of Him Who is in control of every angelic being.

These definite statements would assure the Colossians of all the resources they had in Christ to combat these things against which he warns them. The exhortations come later.

Yet the exhortations are on the lines of warnings, so that they should avoid them. The dangers come from men in the flesh and they appeal to us as in the flesh, but circumcision means that the fleshly order has been ended in the cross of Christ. This v.11 is one of the verses which show that circumcision in the Old Testament is not a type of baptism in the New, for both are mentioned here as distinctive things. In type, they were through the waters of Jordan before they were circumcised.

Circumcision is said to be **in** Him; baptism is said to be **with** Him.

"In which" in v. 3 (New Trans.) would refer to the mystery, but "In Whom" v. 11 would refer to Christ, I suppose.

Yes! and what is in view in v.11 is that at the cross God brought to an end, judicially, that fleshly man that is in me. He did not circumcise it in me but He did circumcise it in Christ, substitutionally that is.

The flesh did not need to be cut off in Christ Personally as we well know, for such was never in Him. It is the cutting off of "our old man" in Him, substitutionally.

Why does it say, "the body of the flesh", as it ought to read?

It is the "old man" in totality. We read in v. 11 "ye are circumcised", for God has done this at the cross; but in v. 12 we are responsible to do something in answer to this. We show our appreciation of what God has done by submitting to the waters of baptism with a view to association with Christ as risen again from among the dead.

Colossians 2: 13-23

There are four things in these verses which we must note, two on the negative side and two on the positive. These are — "circumcision" and "buried"; then, "raised" and "quickenened". This teaches us that one history is closed in the death of Christ and a new history opened up for us in His resurrection. We have seen that resurrection introduces us into a new sphere in association with Christ, and quickening gives us the new life to live there.

Why does it add at the end of v. 13, "having forgiven you all trespasses"?

I judge it is to show that in the new sphere the question of sins will never arise. "Having forgiven" would show that God has settled that question in view of leading us on in the new sphere. I apprehend the Gentile is in view in v. 13 and the Jew in v. 14. The cross of Christ has dealt with both and we have been "quickenened together with Him". We know this is the side of the mystery presented mainly in Ephesians, the Gentile and the Jew. That is one of the places where the Gentile is put before the Jew, both formed into "one body".

Is that why in v. 13 he says "you" and in v. 14 "us"?

Yes! The handwriting of ordinances was never against the Gentiles but it was there against the Jew. On the other hand, so long as that was standing as the house-law (the meaning of the word administration, Col. 1: 25 N.T.), it meant that a Gentile would have had to become a Jewish proselyte, but there is now a new house-law, the mystery, which is "Christ in you, the hope of glory".

I note it is in the singular, the "handwriting of ordinances". I suppose the Jews put their hand to it, the Gentile never did. That condition of things which had grown old has now been taken out of the way and room made for the introduction of the mystery, involving both the Gentile and the Jew.

Would it include the whole ceremonial law?

Yes! the whole economy to which a Gentile would have to subscribe, and we learn from the Acts that there was an attempt on the part of Christians to force the converts into an acceptance of all these ordinances. It was completely against the mind of the Spirit.

What is the force of having nailed it to the cross?

A word in Galatians would help here. It is recorded that Christ has borne the curse of a broken law, as it is written, "Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree" (Gal. 3: 13). This handwriting stood against them in condemnation, it brought in every one of them as guilty before God. We know that while Christ lived He maintained every principle of that covenant, then he died, bearing the curse of the law broken by the people, to deliver them from its bondage.

Emphasis is laid here upon "the cross" (New Trans.), while peace is made by the blood of "His cross" as in Col. 1. In Col. 1 it was more the Person but here it is the way it has been done. It is the cross.

Wherever we get the cross in Scripture it has in view the judgment of man after the flesh. When the blood of Christ is spoken of, the redemptive work which He has accomplished is in view. When the **death** of Christ is spoken of, His love is in view; how clear this is on Lord's Day morning. When the **cross** of Christ is spoken of, the end of that man who could only offend against God is in view. So He met the curse of a broken law when He was nailed to the tree.

Often in our business dealings when a matter fails we tear up the agreement and put it in the fire, but God does not deal with it in that way. He says as it were, I'll take that document which you have signed and fulfil it, so Christ has borne the curse entailed.

We have life in v. 13, quickening; liberty in v. 14; and deliverance from all which held their souls in bondage in v. 15.

You mean by deliverance that He has spoiled principalities and authorities?

Yes! All this is the effect of the cross and makes this ministry effectual. These principalities and powers would be the beings who are opposed to us in the sphere into which we have been introduced through being raised and quickened.

Would the record of Samson carrying the gates of Gaza to the top of the hill be descriptive of this triumph?

Yes! It was done openly; as Paul said — "not done in a corner".

We must remember this is God's acting, not man's. This goes back to the sentence in v. 12, "the operation of God". All these verses are covered by that phrase. In v. 14 the ordinances are brought to an end, hence he says in v. 16, "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink". Principalities and powers being overthrown, as stated in v. 15, was to preserve them from "a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels" (v. 18).

Is "triumphing over them in it" the same as in Eph. 4, "He led captivity captive"?

We usually apply that verse in Ephesians to death itself, all that it meant as bondage to the souls of men. He took it captive in resurrection. Here it is adverse angelic powers, supernatural as we speak. Christ is in supremacy above them, having gained this public victory over them. The cross is the evidence that they have all been eliminated.

In what way is this publicly manifested?

It has reference to the cross of Christ which was a public event. It was a manifestation to the world, and all the world was represented there in the superscription over His head — Hebrew and Greek and Latin. The victory was on the cross according to this verse. The cross was an open event; the resurrection was private, but this was an open victory. The Lord had said of this, "Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the prince of this world be cast out" (John 12: 31). He added also "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me". That is what is here. Resurrection is the victory over death, but here it is the cross where Christ publicly overthrew every adverse power. Death was the result of sin coming into the world and Christ, having dealt with every opposing force when on the cross, went into death to overcome it also — when He was raised from among the dead. It is striking that in 1 Cor. 15 death is said to be the last enemy. It was the last enemy Christ dealt with, having accomplished the work upon the cross, and it is the last enemy He will deal with at the end of the kingdom.

Every power that could be ranged against Christ was seen at the cross; the leaders of the people, the Gentiles, the powers of darkness, the prince of this world, all were there and every one of them has been completely and absolutely defeated. It is well for us to get a clear view of this or we shall not enjoy the victory and liberty which have been secured for us. What we are trying to establish is that His death has cleared the ground of every opposing force and His resurrection has opened up a new sphere where these things can never come.

In Psalm 22 there are seven distinctive enemies enumerated and Christ met every one of them single-handed and overcame them all. The first one is the worst — SIN; and the last one is DEATH. "Save Me from the lion's mouth". The answer is — resurrection.

The result now is "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink". Do not allow any one to put

you again under these legal ordinances, for the death of Christ has ended them. These things would be the ceremonial law which has been spoken of but they are all shadows.

There can be little doubt that this would be a real difficulty to a godly Jew; to think that these things which had been set up by God had to be set on one side.

Is not that what we read of in Hebrews, "He taketh away the first, that He may establish the second"?

No doubt. We apprehend that "of Christ" (v. 17) means that I believe the body here is the body which is attached to the Head, and that body is "of" Christ in derivation and is not derived from the shadows.

This body could not come into being till Christ had set aside the shadows.

Surely, that is why we must not attempt to link the body with the shadows, it is derived from Christ and came into being from Christ in glory, The "but" seems to simplify that; it is a contrast.

What is the reward or prize in v. 18?

That which is stated in v. 19, holding the Head. Do not let us get to worshipping angels etc.; hold the Head.

The worship of angels is shown to be wrong in Scripture, "Let all the angels of God worship **Him**".

What are these "things to come" (v. 17)?

They will be seen displayed fully in the world to come of which the law was but a shadow, but they are here now in Christianity before the world to come is established. They are all available for us today. It is a term used more than once in the epistle to the Hebrews, "But Christ being come an High Priest of good things to come" (Heb. 9: 11). This in fullness is looking on to the world to come, but in that epistle they are all available in the power of the Spirit today. They have come.

Some of our hymn writers had these things in mind, as we note in two lines of No. 233.

Thou dost make us taste the blessing,

Soon to fill a world of bliss.

Are these things contradictory, "doing his own will in humility" and "vainly puffed up by the mind of his flesh" (N.T.)?

That is why he does it; being puffed up by the mind of his flesh he does things which God has never told him to do. All these things are the product of the imagination of a corrupt mind, yet men introduce them into divine service, so-called.

Whilst the angels excel in strength, their measure is that of a man (Rev. 21: 17). I take this to be obedience.

Yes, creature measurement. Why worship that which is limited by creature measurement? We worship before the immeasurable infinity of the blessed God.

It is a serious thing to notice that what actuates all this is the mind of the flesh, and we know from elsewhere that that is enmity against God. However religious and however attractive these things may appear the motive behind it all is anti-God.

Christ in Manhood takes precedence over angels, and we are associated with Him where He now is. The last verse of Hebrews 1 shows the place of angels. It is worth noting that two distinct words are used there for "ministering" and "minister". The word for "ministering" is liturgical — public servants

of God. The word for "minister" is diaconate — to wait upon. Here are the public servants of God who serve Him in every part of the universe, waiting upon the saints of God.

Angels are not brought in to be regarded in a derogatory way, but rather to show the blessed place the saints have as associated with Christ.

Angels have a great work to do both today and as porters at the gates of the holy city, so we must not speak of them in any slighting way; but if God presents to me a MAN above all angels I am not to worship angels but to "hold fast the Head".

What is involved in "holding fast the Head" as the New Translation renders it?

That we turn to Him for all guidance, enlightenment, direction, control, nourishment; for He will give all that I need to move in relation to Him in this world, and He supplies all we need to make those movements according to God.

What is meant by "worship" here?

Giving to these angels what is called sacerdotal service, bowing down to them, ascribing praise and adulation to them. No unfallen angel seeks this, but fallen angels do (Matt. 4: 9). In the Revelation the angel would not have worship from John. He told him to worship God.

If the Head is given His rightful place, what place have the joints and the bands?

We had before us yesterday these four prepositions — "in Whom" (v. 11); "with Whom" (v. 12); "of Christ" (v. 17); "from which" (v. 19). We have been **circumcised in Him**; **buried with Him**; we **are of Him**; and we **receive everything from Him**. It will come from the Head but He may give it to me through those He has chosen to minister these things. All direction and guidance is from **Him**, but we receive it through those whom He uses to minister the truth to us.

We must hold the fact that we are bound to the Word. Men are rising up who claim that they receive things direct from Christ which cannot be found, as they put them, in the Scriptures. We only receive from Him through the medium of the Scriptures. We need to beware of new light etc., and stick to what is given in the Scriptures.

We do get help in private meditation though, looking to the Lord to guide us.

Yes! but it is through the Word. If we follow some we shall soon be saying we do not need the Bible any more.

When Mary came to the disciples she said, "she had seen the Lord, and that He had spoken these things unto her" (John 20: 18). That is the kind of ministry to which you refer.

It is for that is here. It was in the power of that ministry the disciples were gathered together.

I think you have used the term "influenced by the Head", and it may raise the question as to how many of us are. To be in the Christian company at all we must own His Lordship, but then we are led on to know His Priesthood and here we are led on to know His Headship. I do think we need to know more of it.

I am glad you raise that because that is what we all need. The introduction of that word "fast" in the New Trans. is of the last importance. It is not to be a casual matter, or an intermittent matter. Holding **fast** the Head from Whom all comes, through whomsoever it **may** come; but it comes from the Head.

All that we need to function here Christ will supply, and will supply through one and another.

I rather think the three thoughts regarding Headship that are mentioned in the epistles are seen in the feeding of the five thousand. He took **control** when He took the five loaves. He gave **direction** when He commanded them to sit down. In the food He gave them **nourishment**. These three things are connected with Headship.

The disciples were delegated by Him to pass this on. It was food that was increased and magnified and multiplied by the powerful hands of the living Lord Himself, but He delegated the distribution of it to His disciples. Spiritual food does not come from the servant, though the Lord may greatly use such to help us, but the Word has come from Him, from the Head. I appreciate the desire to guard this matter as I think there is a danger of someone attempting to be so hyper-spiritual that they pretend to have fresh light that no one else has got, and which cannot be proved from Scripture.

In the Synoptic Gospels the Lord gives the food to the disciples, but in John He gives it to the multitude Himself. It is one of the points which enhance that gospel that it is not recorded that the disciples gave, but that the Lord gave directly, Himself (see New Trans. John 6: 11).

While we are directly dependent upon the Head for all, He has made us interdependent as members of the body.

Why do you think this particular expression, "holding fast the **Head**", is used?

Obedience is connected more with Lordship and the kingdom, but here it is a question of deriving sustenance from Him. It has been said, He supplies in His Headship all that I need to obey Him in His Lordship.

Does it take a certain amount of spiritual wisdom to hold the Head?

I do not think so! I believe there are many saints who are holding fast the Head who do not know Christ by that term at all. There are some saints who are in touch with Christ from morning to night, yet if we spoke to them of the Head they might wonder what we were talking about. It is important to have a spiritual understanding of it, but it is there for the simplest believer.

Paul said, "immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood" (Gal. 1: 16).

Yes! that is it in operation.

We must note here it is not the increase of the Head but the increase of God. I gather that is why this is linked with the Headship of v. 10.

It might help here to point out that the Headship of Christ is presented in seven distinctive characters, two of them in the Old Testament. In Ps. 18 He is said to be the "Head of the heathen". In Ps. 118 He is said to be "Head of the corner". Creatorially in 1 Cor. 11 He is "Head of every man". In Col. 1: 18, He is "Head of the body". In Eph. 5: 23, He is "Head of the Church". In this chapter He is "Head of all principality and power". In Eph. 1: 22, He is "Head over all things". Now I think that when it says here "The Head", they are all gathered together.

I thought it linked up with the fact that He is the One in Whom is all the fulness of the Godhead. This is what we are drawing from, the One Who has all the resources of Godhead dwelling in Him; and as we see this Headship linked with that aspect of the One in Whom dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, we see the absolute foolishness of attempting to draw from any other source.

What is the end in view in all this?

As the result of nourishment being ministered, we are knit together corporately and increase with the increase of God. We touch here one of the mediatorial offices which Christ is filling as the Head, with

a view to building us up spiritually in the knowledge of God.

If we were not drawing from the Head we might forget these hidden joints and bands. Every saint of God is drawing from this blessed One Who is Head of the body, and that must of necessity result in a uniting together and an increase which is according to God. Is this not the object of all ministry that there may be increase according to God? We do not want an increase of doctrine and knowledge only, important as that is, but we do want an increase that is of God that He may become blessedly real to us.

I would not care to attempt to speak to the saints without first asking counsel from the Lord as to what to say and then asking help of Him in saying it. That is holding fast the Head. When things are done that way, we can be assured that some impress of God will come about as a consequence. I have to acknowledge this is going on in ministry and if I ignore it I am going to miss much help in the things of God. It is there for every one of us as members of His body.

Colossians 3: 1-11

We have gathered from the ground already covered in the two preceding chapters that Christ, as Head of the body to which we belong, has every resource for every member to enable us to function for Him in this world. As Gentiles, in whom Christ has been formed, we are able to live pleurably to God in this world now. Then we saw in Col. 2 many things which we need to avoid, things which are of no help to us in the service of God. Now we come to the positive side of that to which we have been called, and again read of other things we need to avoid. The chapter opens presenting the objective sphere where Christ is in glory and our association with Him there as raised, then goes on to show that having put off the old man and put on the new man, the features of Christ come to light in every one of us.

I suppose the meaning of this "if" is "seeing this is so", seek the things which are above.

We see here the counterpart of our having died with Christ; now we are said to be raised with Him. I suppose one is consequent upon the other.

We have already noted from Col. 2 that we are said to be both raised and quickened. Not only have we a place in that sphere with Christ as raised, we also have the power to live there — we have been quickened. It is a new sphere of life entirely in association with Christ in glory. It is well to note that we are said to be quickened together **with** Christ. Not only has God caused us to live, we live in relation to Christ not in a detached way at all.

Can we define these "things which are above"?

What characterizes these things is that they are **with Christ** at the right of God. We are to seek them and have our minds on them. This involves real exercise of heart as following the rich ministry of the previous chapters. These things should become attractive to us, for we do not seek things which are not attractive to us. In Psalm 27 we read, "One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after". It is not sufficient to have desires after these things; we must seek after them. It seems that if we were seeking the things above the Spirit would be more free to reveal them to us, for all those things, though spoken of as the depths of God, stand in relation to a Man Who is at the right hand of God.

A completely new order of things has come into existence now as available for the saints of God, and Christ is the centre of them in glory. These things could not come out while He was living in this world; but after His death, resurrection and ascension the whole scope of these spiritual blessings is opened out for us, and that is what we are exhorted to seek after.

There were many things which the Lord said to His disciples which they were not to speak about till He was risen from the dead. They had to wait till the Spirit had come and the right presentation of what He had given would be known to them. Now our life is hid with Christ in God and these things are not publicly known. They can be known only in a realm where we are in association with Himself, and to those in mind at the beginning of the chapter, "if ye then be risen with Christ".

What is the force of this expression "at the right hand of God"?

In the epistle to the Hebrews it is said four times of the Lord that He is sitting at "the right hand". In Heb. 1 He "has sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high". In Heb. 8 it is "on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens". In Heb. 10 it is "on the right hand of God", and in Heb. 12 "at the right hand of the **throne** of God". When His Personal glory is in view in Heb. 1 and Heb. 10 it is the right hand of God, while as Priest and Overcomer He is at the right hand of the throne. It amplifies what has been said that the Man in the glory of God is God in His Person.

"To which of the angels said He at any time, Sit on My right hand?" (Heb. 1: 13). We were speaking of the worship of angels yesterday, but that verse would preclude any such thought. When our Lord was before the council He said, "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power" (Matt. 26: 64). That meant He was the Son of God. It is the place of power but also a striking testimony to the glory of His Person.

I understand His being at the right hand of God is to show that as co-equal with God He will carry out everything for the pleasure of God, and this place is unique to Christ in Manhood. We are said to be seated with Christ in heavenly places, but it never says we shall be at the right hand of God.

Would these things which are above be the spiritual blessings which are ours in Christ?

I do not doubt that. In Ephesians we are said to have been blessed with them in heavenly places in Christ; here in the beginning of the chapter we are told to seek them as we are still on the earth, but associated with Christ in resurrection in the power of a new life.

Why does the New Translation give it as "the Christ"?

Some have averred that "**the** christ" is always a title, but you will find an important note on this very matter in 2 Cor. 1 (New Trans.). J.N.D. shows it is not always a title nor always a name. We have understood the anointed vessel in 1 Cor. 12: 12 to be the body, and the footnote helps in relation to this point.

"Sitting" indicates something completed as we know so well from Hebrews, and He sits there to bring into being everything for the pleasure of God.

The contrast to things above is obviously things on the earth. There is a difference between worldly things and earthly things, and it may be we are more in danger of earthly things than worldly things.

It was that which brought tears to the eyes of the apostle as he tells us in Philippians of those "who mind earthly things", and he does not say of them that they were enemies of Christ but enemies of the cross of Christ.

Three times in the gospel of John we have recorded that the Lord spoke of being lifted up, but only in John 12 are those significant words added, "will draw all men unto Me". It is lifted up "from the earth"; He has left the earth and we are to leave the earth in our affections as attracted to Him. First we seek these things, then we set our minds upon them; we go after them as minded to allow them to have an effect upon us.

Would it not test us when we meet one another as to whether we speak of earthly things or heavenly things?

We have a helpful illustration of this in the two going to Emmaus. The topic of their conversation was Himself. When He asked them of the things of which they were speaking they said, "Concerning Jesus". Though disappointed, the topic of their conversation was Jesus. Then He enlarges on that by giving them something more — the knowledge that Christ was risen.

The sphere of life in Colossians 3 has been mentioned. We have been quickened in our souls as seen in Colossians 2, but here it says "your life is hid with Christ in God". I think it is importance to get hold of this objective side of life, for the life we are given in our souls is lived in the sphere where Christ is.

Say something about the phrase, "ye are dead", and what is involved in "your life is hid with Christ in God".

We have this life while we are on earth but it is not given us for the earth. So far as our spiritual history is concerned we are dead to things here, and we live that new life in the scene where Christ is, a life said to be "hid with Christ in God".

Perhaps our brother has in mind the absolute character of this statement. In other Scriptures we are said to be dead to certain things, but here it is categorically stated "ye have died" (N.T.).

That subject is raised in Colossians 2. In relation to our baptism we profess to have died. No doubt in the thought of God that is true, but we professed it in baptism. It is a definite statement that we have to accept. God Himself has brought it about through the death of Christ. If it is asserted that we are risen then we must have died. It may be asked, Died to what? Died to everything which could not be associated with Christ in glory.

This seems to be the most absolute statement on this matter in the New Testament. In Romans 6 we are exhorted to reckon ourselves dead; Paul said he bore continually in his body the dying of Jesus; but here we are said to be dead as an absolute statement.

From whom is this life hidden?

From the men of this world. It is not hidden from us, for it says "your life". We are just guarding the fact that it is our spiritual life as the fruit of what God has effected. "If ye then be risen with Christ", that is, in the operation of God associating us with Christ.

It has been said as to our bodies, we are still in Egypt; as to our experience we are in the wilderness; but through faith we are in the land.

What life was the apostle Paul referring to when he said, "The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God" (Gal. 2: 20)?

I think it was this life coming out in practice. He was no longer living to himself, but living to and for Christ in that new impulse of life he had received from the Son of God. No doubt in Galatians it stands in contrast to trying to live by the law; he lived by the faith of the Son of God indicating, no doubt, Christianity in its power.

There is only one life spiritually, whatever name is given to it. Sometimes it is called eternal life, but there is only one kind of spiritual life in our souls.

We have a definition of this life here; "Christ, who is our life".

Would not Joash when hid in the temple be a picture of this? Faithful hearts in Israel knew of him there

and bowed to him there in view of the day when he would come forth and take his rightful place on the throne. As Joash was ultimately manifested, so will Christ be. One could hardly imagine that any fellowship between the supporters of Athaliah and those of Joash would be possible. So it is today.

Life is characterized by relationships, affections and enjoyments. If then our life is hid with Christ in God, all our relationships, affections and enjoyments are there.

In the gospel it is recorded that "he that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life" (John 3: 36). Is this a different aspect of that life?

There is only one source of life and one power of life in our souls, whatever the different characteristics of that life may be. Here it is lived in the new realm of things which has come into existence through the resurrection of Christ. Eternal life is lived in communion with the Father and the Son. The same life, but looked at in two distinctive ways. No doubt development goes on in that life, but it was there in germ from the outset of our new history with God.

Would this be what the apostle speaks of as laying hold on eternal life?

Yes! for the correct rendering of that phrase is, "Lay hold of what is really life" (1 Tim. 6: 19, N.T.). Life in this world is not really life. This is, for it is lived in the things which will not end in death.

When it speaks of "**your** life", that which we have in possession, it is a hidden matter. When it is defined as "Christ who is **our** life" it has manifestation in view. The day is coming when it will be manifested in the world to come that the life we have been living now is that very life which will be in evidence then.

If we accept the word "Your life is hid with Christ", we shall not wish for prominence in this world, its honours will not appeal to us.

We do not want to hurt anyone, but all those things will be eschewed if we are really true to the fact that our life is hidden with Christ. We may as well be practical about it, we are either living for heaven, or living for earth; it must be one or the other. We must settle it in our minds that we cannot live for both worlds. I may try to persuade you that I can, but the fact is I cannot. I cannot spend my time sitting on councils and such like and then come to the meetings and begin to open up the truth of the mystery. I shall not have the time or inclination to appreciate such truth.

Are these definite statements true of every Christian?

Yes, indeed! They are stated to encourage our hearts so that we may seek to enjoy these things which are above. If I could move naturally into this I should not need the exhortation to seek it. Then comes the other side, "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth". Life **there** and my old life **here** cannot go on together.

As true of me that I have died to things here, I now seek to mortify my members in relation to my former life here. God has given me the right to live in that new sphere and in appreciation I seek to die to life in this sphere, for **I can** live that old life if I want to. Let us truly face this matter. We shall never be free from these potential dangers as long as we are here, hence we need this warning. What then are we to do? God has said we are dead, but here we are as men and women in this scene, and there are certain habits which are catalogued for us from which we can never say we are free. The point is that when these things present themselves to us we are to mortify them at their very conception.

We spoke at the beginning of the objective sphere of that life; now the subjective answer is coming out in these verses.

Does Gilgal come in here?

It does. Circumcision removes the reproach of Egypt. I remember a brother once explaining that very simply. He said that when asking about a certain brother sitting in the meeting, he was told, "Had you known that man before he was converted you would not now recognise him". He was a drunkard etc.. Now, sitting so happily in the meeting, all those former marks had gone. The reproach of Egypt had been rolled away from him, for he was **practically** circumcised from his old life. Do the people who live with us in the same town see that we too are not marked by the things which mark the men of this world? Such things ought to have gone in mortification. "In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them". Not now! That verse is in the past tense.

Will you explain the statement, "Covetousness which is idolatry"? It is so often condemned in the Scriptures.

So far as I understand it, covetousness means allowing the desire of something God has not given us **the first place** in our hearts. Thus it takes the place in our affections which belongs only to God and becomes an idol. Whatever displaces God in our affections is an idol. We may desire certain things in this life which we think would be for our good, but to covet them leads to the surrender of everything in order to get them, and they then become idols.

That is a good description of idolatry — something which displaces God in our affections — and that is what covetousness leads to.

What would be the difference between mortifying and putting off as in v. 8?

Mortifying refers to the members of our body, while putting off is in relation to what we **are** as characterized by the old man; as we read, "seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds". I may end those things which are externally evil without putting off those things which are still latent in me — the old man. I cannot mortify them but I can put them off.

This mortifying is really a violent thing — putting to death. How does it work out in us?

Suppose I have a pressing temptation in regard to something which appeals to me and I naturally would give myself to that because it does appeal to me, it would mean violence to myself to refuse it. I think Peter has that in mind when he says; "Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind; for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin" (1 Peter 4: 1). We do not always know what others are suffering by deliberately avoiding certain things.

"Make thee sharp knives" was the word of God to Israel in Gilgal. Not one of us knows what the secret of another is. The evidence that we have faced this exercise with God is seen when the features of the new man come to light.

Would this truth of putting off the old man and putting on the new be illustrated in Elijah and Elisha?

Yes, indeed! the sons of the prophets said of Elisha, "The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha" (2 Kings 2: 15). He had rent his own garments and adopted the garment of Elijah. He had no further use for the old robe.

Then it says, "Lie not one to another". We tells lies about things we have done and are too ashamed to own up to. If we are doing the things we ought to do we shall never be tempted to tell a lie. Let us note the place the tongue has in this list. James, as we well know, tells us how much evil it can cause. It is rather humbling to have to admit that all these things are in me and if I am not watchful they will soon manifest themselves.

How can we mortify them?

Seek the things which are above. That is how we have power to do so. If our minds are ever set on those things we instinctively say, "That is not going to be of any help", and we mortify it. If we have not the attraction of this better sphere governing us, we shall not have even the desire to up them off, much less the power.

If we have our hearts filled with the things which are above we shall not fear any of these things coming out.

All these negative things are summed up in the "old man". This term is used to give a complete representation of every evil feature fallen man is capable of. If we could gather together every evil thing in their totality we should see a personification of that man we should cry, Away with such a fellow, it is not fit that he should live.

That is just what God did when He crucified him with Christ. Now we are said to have put him off. In Colossians 1, where we are said to have believed the truth of the gospel, we put off the old man by **faith**. In Colossians 2, where we are said to have put off the body of the flesh, we put off the old man by **profession**. Now, in these verses by putting off his deeds we put off the old man by **practice**. We did not know of course when we believed the gospel that we were putting off the old man, but we did by faith — by profession when we were baptized; and by practice when we put on the deeds of the new man.

Well now, having disposed of the old man, what about the new man?

It is Christ formed in our souls by the Spirit of God. It does not say new **men** as though it was the company. It is that work by the Spirit in every one of our souls.

The new man is neither you nor me personally, but what the Spirit has formed of Christ in each one of us. I do not find the saints in this district doing anything different from the saints in other districts, for we all take character from Christ. The new man is not Christ personally, for He is the Second Man, but is Christ characteristically formed by the Spirit in our souls. We may make excuses for failing to maintain this by suggesting a different environment, but it matters not where we are or what we are, Christ ought to be seen in each one of us.

Could we have a word on "renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him"?

I apprehend the Creator of the new man is God, for God ever brings in new creation. I think it is God coming to light in testimony in each one of us.

Does the renewing into full knowledge give me the capability of looking at things in the way God looks at them?

The word for "renewing" is "anakainow", something entirely new. We have an entirely new motive, an entirely new power in our thinking, for we think for God now and not for ourselves. It is in the present tense.

In regard to thinking as God thinks, we have a very strong word used in 1 Cor. 2: 16, "But we have the mind of Christ". It has been pointed out that the word for "mind" there means "the same thinking capacity". The marvel is we have the thinking capacity "of Christ" and can understand divine things with the same kind of mind as Christ. We have this by having the Spirit Who searches the depths of God. May we use that mind in our thinking and so be found always considering for God. Christ will then come to light in each one of us and the features of God will be seen in display in testimony.

Colossians 4: 7-18

It is in mind, at the end of our readings, to consider the saints mentioned in the Scripture we have read together. There are several, I think, in whom we see in a living way how the truth of the epistle works out in the formation of Christian character. We see this coming out in the features of those who surrounded Paul, and who were no doubt affected by his ministry. It may have been that Tychicus took this letter to the saints because he could give an account of what was happening to Paul in the prison; Paul was also looking for him to bring back an account of what was happening in Colosse. It showed mutual interest in one another. How happy it will be, as we are about to move away from each other, if that which marked these men marks us and comes into evidence in our dealings one with another; the companies to which we belong benefiting as the fruit of what we have had before us, and room made for the Holy Spirit to continue ministering Christ to us.

It is evident that Tychicus profited considerably from Paul's ministry, for he was considered by the apostle to be a vessel competent to visit both the Colossians and the Ephesians. In view of the truth given to these two companies, it would be a test of the spiritual stature of the man whom he sent to them. We are told in the epistle to Timothy, "Tychicus have I sent to Ephesus". That would show there was discrimination with the apostle in discerning which vessel had profited by the ministry. Something distinctive is said of these persons but there are exceptions, for nothing is said of Demas in a complimentary way, just a reference. Evidently the apostle, moving under the power of the Spirit, detected what was there, for Demas had not yet openly defected. That in itself is a solemn warning to us, as to whether we may, after these meetings, be found without any of these features formed in us. There should be some feature in each of us which the Holy Spirit can take account of and use among the saints. It is a very serious challenge to us all at the end of these meetings.

Tychicus is first on the list and Demas last (so far as Paul's company is concerned) and one of the features which marked Tychicus appeared to be just the thing which tested Demas, that is, the feature of the "fellow-bondman". Demas was not prepared to suffer along with the glad tidings. Three things are said about Tychicus, "a beloved brother, and a faithful minister and fellow-servant in the Lord".

"Fellow-bondman", as the word is, may not mean that he was in prison but he certainly had been in the prison with Paul and was quite prepared for affliction and rejection.

Why should it be considered a good commendation to be called a brother?

I gather that when Paul says, "Quartus a brother" (Romans 16: 23), Quartus had given every evidence of acting as a brother and was dependable in fulfilling his service for the Lord. He is not addressed either as a teacher or as an evangelist, but "the brother, Quartus" (N.T.), as though there was something about him which made the saints very thankful he was with them.

I take it this would not be in the eyes of Paul only. He must have been so regarded in the estimation of the brethren.

Paul always makes room for the features of a brother. In his two epistles to the Corinthians, where much needed to be put right, he associated a brother with himself; "Sosthenes our brother" in the first epistle, and "Timothy our brother" in the second.

Paul did not just lay hands on a man standing by having nothing to do, in divine things that does not happen. One is fitted for the work entrusted, and it would take some degree of spiritual judgment in Tychicus to enable him to outline to Paul the state of the Colossians, and also to outline the feelings of Paul towards them.

Paul in writing to the Philippians said of Timotheus he had "no man like-minded who will naturally care for your state".

Do we gather from this that what a man is as a brother is really greater than what he is in gift?

I think we must all accede to that.

What is the distinction between Tychicus and Onesimus?

He gets a similar commendation though evidently working in a different sphere. Tychicus is said to be a "faithful minister", while Onesimus is said to be a "faithful and beloved brother". One feature may be seen more prominently in one than in another. If this is the same person as mentioned in Philemon, it would be worth recounting now that he was "faithful". He had not been that before meeting Paul.

Perhaps they appreciated a beloved brother more than a faithful minister. By nature we tend to love affection more than faithfulness.

If we are appreciating and going on with Paul's ministry we shall value faithfulness.

We need to differentiate in our appreciation of the brethren but we should love them all.

That is why we said these men fill different spheres. Tychicus had a ministry committed to him which Onesimus did not have, but we must not think less of Onesimus because of that. He was probably shining just as brilliantly in another circle. "Beloved" and "faithful" need not describe different brothers, they may be combined in one, as they were in Tychicus.

This term "a beloved brother" is not thrown out indiscriminately, there were features there which called for it. If a brother is to be beloved there must be features about him which are lovable. Our love is not like the love of God as to its source, but it should be in its character. God loved us when we were **unlovable**, but there should be in us as brethren features that can be loved, and that is a challenge to us.

That is why Peter in his epistle says, "in brotherly love, love" (2 Peter 1: 7. N.T.). We love all the saints of God but I must say that certain brothers call out my love in a way some do not. Is that what you mean?

It is, and it need not be hypocritical, for brotherly love may cause us to speak in faithfulness at times.

When John wrote to Gaius as well-beloved he also spoke of his walking in the truth, and then said, "Beloved, thou doest faithfully".

One always hesitates to bring the Lord in when exhortations are before us, but is there not a very blessed example of this in John 13? He loved, and served them in love; then having put on His garments again He began to teach them, and they were ready to listen to His ministry because of the effect His love had had upon them. I am convinced that if the brethren recognized that those who minister have a real love and care for them, and that what they say is springing from their hearts' desire for the encouragement of the saints and for the promotion of the things of God, the ministry will be listened to, however faithful it may have to be. "A beloved brother, and a faithful minister", would lead to our taking the place of a bondman in faithfully serving the saints in love, a most precious thing.

Paul, no doubt, excelled in these features but he was great enough to recognize them in others.

Onesimus is referred to as a beloved brother "both in the flesh, and in the Lord" (Philemon 16). That is a remarkable expression, relating to what we speak of as mundane things as well as to the interests of the Lord.

Then we have Aristarchus, "a fellow-prisoner", one who was quite prepared to suffer affliction along

with the glad tidings.

There are three expressions in this chapter — fellow-servant, fellow-prisoner and fellow-worker. Together they show a beautiful expression of fellowship.

The word in the previous chapter "the bond of perfectness" (v. 14) is the same word as "bands" in Colossians 2: 19. That feature would appear to be coming to light in this chapter.

I have thought that these three expressions are an epitome of the teaching of this epistle, fellow-servants, fellow-prisoners and fellow-workers. The epistle to the Colossians is not altogether individual; it has the body in mind, working together; moving together; being knit together. Here is a practical expression of these features coming out in men who are named.

It is striking that he should say, "These only are my fellow-workers", and yet Barnabas is named in v.10. It is not Barnabas to whom he is calling attention but Marcus, Barnabas had apparently ceased to be a fellow-worker with Paul. We know the history in regard to Marcus and it seems from that moment Barnabas and Paul ceased to be fellow-workers. It is striking that the very man who was the cause of the difficulty now comes in as a fellow-worker, and can we not assume that this wonderful recovery had come about in Marcus through an increased appreciation of Paul's special ministry?

So if Demas is slipping away, Marcus is in the way of recovery. Paul says to Timothy, "Take Mark, and bring him with thee; for he is profitable to me for the ministry" (2 Tim. 4: 11).

In that very chapter there is a further moral touch which is beautiful to see. Here, in order to identify him he says "Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas", but when it is a question of his complete serviceableness to Paul there is no mention of his being Barnabas's relative.

Would it be significant that Mark was nurtured in an atmosphere of prayer? I refer to Acts 12, where it says of Peter when he was free of the prison, "And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying". Obviously that was not the first time there had been a prayer meeting in that house.

Another thing comes to light here, it is Paul who is giving commandment concerning him as though there may have been some hesitation with the other brethren concerning him. He who first detected the defection is the one who encourages the others to receive him.

Are you suggesting that the eye should ever be open for features of recovery? Do you not think that may be a practical matter as to brethren whom we have not seen for some time?

It is certainly remarkable that this man who had been such an unprofitable servant was taken up by God to write of the perfect Servant. It shows how complete the recovery was. Paul appears to be very glad to commend him as recognizing his recovery.

Then we come to Justus, another man of whom no outstanding thing is said, but he is seen as in the company of fellow-workers.

Would this be the man whose house was hard by the synagogue?

It may be so — but we cannot speak with certainty. Being of the circumcision may suggest it was the same man.

It is worth noting in that connection that Paul says of Justus that he was "of the circumcision", while he had taught in Colossians 3 that in the new man there was neither circumcision nor uncircumcision.

We have to note a clear distinction there; it is "in Christ Jesus" that there is neither Jew nor Gentile. A

Jew converted to the Christian faith would not cease to be a Jew as to flesh and blood conditions. We have to distinguish between what we are as "in Christ" and what we still are in the body. The classic reference as to this matter is found in comparing Galatians with 1 Corinthians. We read in Gal. 3: 28 that, "There is neither male nor female . . . in Christ Jesus". Then in 1 Cor. 14: 34 we read, "Let your women keep silence in the churches". Not seeing this distinction has led some to say, Women can speak in the meeting for in Christ there is neither male nor female.

It does not seem as though there had been many who were a consolation to Paul.

I suppose there must have been some outstanding work with these men who had been a tremendous encouragement to him. It is good to note these things, for we may have to note and comment at times upon the lack of interest in certain ones; not that we want to develop a complaining spirit. If we do have to mention this lack of interest at times, let us not forget that there **are** those who are deeply devoted to the interests of the Lord. If Paul needed encouragement, and took courage as he looked at them, let us look at such and take courage. Paul would trace all this back to the Lord and would be encouraged that his ministry had taken effect in the saints. It must have been a comfort to him to trace these features, for there were many who had opposed him, many who forsook him. In the midst of such conditions to be able to take account of those who are fellow-bondmen in the Lord would be an immense encouragement.

Epaphras being a local brother would know what to pray for, "always labouring fervently for you in prayers".

According to the New Translation, Tychicus was a "fellow-bondman in (the) Lord", but Epaphras was "the bondman of Christ Jesus".

In the fourth chapter of Ephesians, Paul speaks of himself as "the prisoner of the Lord", but in the third chapter he had spoken of himself as the "prisoner of the Christ Jesus" (New Trans.). I apprehend that as the prisoner of Christ Jesus he speaks in relation to the mystery, and as the prisoner of the Lord there is an answer to the mystery in a subject service to the Lord. Thus when he speaks as the prisoner of the Lord he speaks of their walk; it is the sphere of responsibility. Whereas in the third chapter, which is a parenthesis, he refers to the wonderful grace given to him in relation to the mystery. He was held for that reason, to unfold to them the truth of the mystery, but as a bondman of the Lord he refers to their responsibility.

We might suggest that Tychicus being a servant of the Lord would pray for the saints in relation to their walk, while Epaphras would pray that the truth might be established in their affections.

Epaphras praying that they "may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God" covers the whole truth of this epistle.

We have noted previously as to Paul agonizing in prayer on their account, that this truth might find a place in their affections. Here, the same word is used of Epaphras, agonizing in prayer.

Is Epaphras a good specimen of what was mentioned earlier in the readings, a brother who not only taught the saints but had them in his heart? In Colossians 1: 7 we read he ministered Christ to them; here we read he prays for them.

Would you help us on this expression, "fellow-workers unto the kingdom of God"?

We have said much in these meetings about the world to come and I think the kingdom of God here is the world to come. We know that kingdom is established today in the power of the Spirit; we see it and enter it as born of God but here its display in a day that is coming is in mind, and they were labouring

in view of that day. There is only one kingdom so far as God is concerned, but it is presented to us in at least ten different characters — past, present and future — and I doubt not it is the aspect of future display which is in view here. In Colossians 1 it is called "the kingdom of His dear Son". It is the same kingdom but in its **present** aspect there. The law of the kingdom for us today is **love**.

Colosse was the local meeting of Epaphras and at the moment he was away from it. The nearest meeting was Laodicea, and he appeared to have a very great interest in both places. He seemed to have a heart like Paul had in his feelings towards the Corinthians. We perhaps would have cut them off, but Paul never gave them up, and Epaphras appears as though he would not give the Laodiceans up.

There were overcomers in both assemblies. How many may have been affected by this word we do not know. There was a blessing at that time for the overcomer in Laodicea, "I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me" (Rev. 3: 20).

In Laodicea the strongest incentive is given to the overcomer, for the Lord presents Himself as the Overcome. There could not be a greater incentive to overcoming than that.

Why did he keep on praying for the saints in Hierapolis? So far as I know this is the only place where it is mentioned. I may sometimes pray for saints in Australia although I know nothing at all about their conditions. No doubt he did know the saints at Hierapolis, although we have no other record of them; he continued to pray for them. That would be carrying out the exhortation that we should pray for all saints.

Would you consider this to be the characteristic service of Epaphras?

It seems to be so. It may be that Paul and he prayed together about these matters, for Paul speaks of his agony in chapter 1, and as Epaphras similarly comes in here it may well be they prayed together about these things.

The man with the greatest gift is prepared to speak about the prayers of his brother. This man with an apostolic gift is bringing into prominence the service of another.

He speaks like that of the Philippians, making much of their service, and reference to his own as a drink offering poured out on their sacrifice. Paul uses the balances of the sanctuary in doing this. Otherwise it would be flattery. All these statements are made in the light of the holiest for he weighs these things before God. We may flatter one another and injure one another; we may call attention to a brother's service to others and injure him in doing it, unless it is weighed in the balances of the sanctuary. I am convinced that every bit of the appraisal which Paul gives here was in the power of the Holy Spirit.

What are you referring to by the balances of the sanctuary?

Weighing things in the presence of God, and not according to my partiality or how I like the brother who said it. No, these were weighed in the presence of God and given the value that He would put upon them as being material to help His saints.

That would be viewing things in the light of the judgment seat of Christ.

That is what was in mind in regard to the kingdom of God. That is where things come out. It is the balances of the sanctuary which put a real assessment upon our work.

Hannah had that in mind when she said, "the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by Him actions are weighed" (1 Sam. 2: 3).

In regard to Luke we have a brother mentioned in relation to his secular calling. "Luke, the beloved

physician"; an encouragement to us that we can go on with these things without giving up our secular calling. Here we are in different walks of life and yet we regard each other from the standpoint of the divine circle, "beloved brother", whatever calling may be followed.

His calling did not give him any place of exaltation, nor did it militate against what he was as beloved. Some of the saints are more affluent in their circumstances than others, but however that may be this adjective can be added. I think it is beautiful to see that a person can get on in business and still be a beloved person. It seems to suggest that he carries his Christianity into his business.

Then just a short word as to Demas. I do not think Paul would give up praying for him. The fact that he mentions his name would prove he was still interested in him. He was, of course, still there.

The parable in the first part of Luke 15 seems to be repeated in Matt. 18, only that there it says, "And if so be that he find it". There is no "if so be" in Luke 15 for there it is the work of the Lord Himself as Shepherd. There is an "if so be" in Matt. 18, for there it is our work. The Lord always finds the one He goes after; I may fail, but that does not mean I ought not to try to recover a brother who has gone astray. I may have the pleasure of bringing him back again.