

Image and Superscription

G. Davison

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It is in mind to call attention to two words which came from the lips of our Lord as recorded in the three synoptic Gospels. The two words are "image" and "superscription," each having a voice for us today as we hope to see. We look first into the bearing of the word "image."

The occasion which drew these words from the lips of the Lord Jesus is recorded for us in Matthew 22: 15-22. What a sad picture is presented in this section of the Gospel where we read of the Pharisees in concert with the Herodians — ecclesiastics and politicians — who while detesting each other, yet found in their open hatred of our Lord Jesus Christ ground upon which they could move together.

The question which they raised was one which, in their opinion, would entrap the Lord either in relation to the state or the temple — the claims of Caesar or the claims of God. Does not such an incident enhance before our souls the majesty of our Lord? The human mind, however advanced in knowledge, would not have given so simple yet profound an answer to their crafty question. Manifestly the Lord Jesus is "over all, God."

Replying to their question the Lord asked them to shew Him a penny; a coin of different value but apparently of similar formation to the penny we have today, with the head of the emperor impressed in the centre and the superscription round the edge. These marks demonstrated that the coin belonged to the realm of Caesar, and quite rightly should be rendered to him. What an astonishing answer to their crafty question! The remainder of His answer was a serious challenge to the consciences of those who had posed the question — "And unto God the things that are God's." If such marks on the coin were a definite proof that it belonged to Caesar, we do well to ask — What and where are the marks of that which belongs to God? They are on the whole human race by creation, and — by redemption — more abundantly upon the saints today.

In Genesis 1: 27 we read, "So God created man in His own image." This word "image" does not signify an idol. It is so used at times, but its primary indication is — representation. This first mention of the word in the above quotation (whether said by God in verse 26, or recorded by the writer of Genesis verse 27) clearly indicates representation. Adam was the representative of God in government, v. 28; Christ as the image of God represented God in love and grace to a sinful world (2 Corinthians 4: 4); the saints of God today are said to be in the image of Christ (2 Corinthians 3: 18). As Adam by creation was the representative of God in government, and Christ in incarnation was the representative of God in love and grace, we now are the representatives of Christ in this present world, not only as gospel preachers, but as manifesting the features which came to light in Christ Himself when here on this earth.

In this way we *manifestly* own the claims of God upon us. Christ "the second Man" shewed in His life what man ought to be as owning the rights of God; and having put on "the new man" we can, and should, come out in these same features as owning the rights of God over us. This is not merely a negative life marked by what we do not do, but consists in what we *positively* do as in the service of our God in this world. Let us ask ourselves in sincerity — What are we each doing, willingly and intelligently, in the service of the God who has so richly blessed us? As this question raises exercises in our hearts, we find the scriptural answer to them in those well-known verses Romans 12: 1-2. "I

beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service," Romans 12: 1.

This exhortation is neither a command nor a demand, but an appeal to our spiritual instincts to yield ourselves to God for His service. The appeal is based upon "the mercies of God" which He has shewn towards us. These mercies are contained in the teaching of this epistle, mainly from Romans 3 to Romans 8, and principally they are as follows — *Righteousness; Justification; and Redemption*, Romans 3: 22-24; *Reconciliation*, Romans 5: 10; *Eternal Life*, Romans 5: 21; *Deliverance*, Romans 7: 24, 25. Then we have also the gift of the *Holy Spirit of God*, mentioned over twenty times in Romans 8, indicating the features of a new spiritual race, true of every believer on our Lord Jesus Christ. These are some of the favours showered upon us, referred to here as "the mercies of God."

We may well ask ourselves — what can we do in answer to all these divine blessings but devote ourselves entirely to the service of the God who has so wonderfully favoured us? The appeal is to present our "bodies." This involves our movements in the present world. We may feel very devoted to God in mind or heart, but it is in active service that we answer to this appeal, a life lived *daily* in the service of God, not the thought of "sacrifice" once offered, but a *living* sacrifice. Entire dedication to the service of God will entail sacrificing much of our own desires and interests in this present world, the very world from which God has rescued us. Beloved, what are these worldly things which would rob us of this privilege of serving God, and rob God of our service? James rightly describes them for us as *earthly, sensual, devilish*" James 3: 15. Sad indeed to think of saints of God giving their time and service to such things in preference to those which are *heavenly, spiritual and eternal!*

It is in this way, walking *daily* through this world as subject to the will of God, and ever seeking His interests, that we shall "Render . . . unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." Let us remember that, whilst it is important to render to man his rightful due, it is of utmost importance that we also render to God that which is due to Him. If we allow God to have His rightful sway over us as of first importance, what is due to man and to the governments of this world will not be lacking in our lives as the servants and representatives of God.

When the penny was shown to our Lord (Matthew 22) He not only referred to the image, but also to the superscription. Whatever writing was round the edge of the coin, it would in some way give a description of the Emperor whose image was in the centre. Previously reference was made to the *image* of God; we turn now to the thought of divine writing, which we venture to call the *superscription* of God.

"Manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart: 2 Corinthians 3: 3.

Two distinct writings of God are referred to in this interesting section of the word. The first, on tables of stone, was written with ink; the second on fleshy tables of the hearts of the saints, and written with "the Spirit of the living God"; which latter suggests living impressions, something quite apart from the dead formalism which the law produced. The first writing did result in two things being manifested, as the section assures us — "condemnation" and "death," (vv. 7, 9). The second writing has also brought two things into evidence — "righteousness" and "the Spirit," (vv. 8, 9). Nor are we left in doubt as to what the Spirit ministers — it is "life" (v. 6).

How thankful we are to have come under the power and blessing of the second writing, and to be free from the hopeless bondage of the first. Under the bondage of the old covenant Israel utterly failed to render "unto God the things that are God's." As an *objective* demand without giving the power to answer to it, it resulted in a ministry of "condemnation." Today, God, by the Spirit is writing

subjectively in the hearts of the saints all that is true in Christ *objectively* at His right hand in glory. As the result of this living "ministration," we are being formed after our Lord Jesus Christ, and as that which is characteristic of Him is seen in its measure in ourselves we are thus able to render "unto God the things that are God's."

The old covenant was a manifestation of the righteousness and holiness of God, but the new covenant is a manifestation of the love, grace, mercy and disposition of God as Saviour. This has resulted in a company enabled by the Holy Spirit to walk here subject to the will of God, and in this way, as marked by the features of Christ, we become HIS letter of commendation to the world. That this testimony may become more powerful in our lives, we have to learn that, as brought to God through the work of Christ, He must now be the One from whom we learn if we are to walk as He walked. Hence we read further in this section —

But we all, looking on the glory of the Lord, with unveiled face, are transformed according to the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Lord the Spirit." 2 Corinthians 3: 18 (N. Tr.).

Note how this verse mentions the thought with which we commenced — image. This chapter, therefore, links together both "image" and "superscription" and shows without any doubt that both are true of the saints of God today. Perhaps the outstanding thought of all is found in the word "transformed." This word is used in the New Testament on three occasions only — Matthew 17: 2, where it is rendered as "transfigured"; Romans 12: 2, where it appears as "transformed"; 2 Corinthians 3: 18, where in the Authorised Version the word is given as "changed." In the original the word is the same throughout, and in this verse it is rendered as "transformed" in the New Translation, (Mark 9: 2 refers to the same incident as Matthew). There is no doubt that this word indicates *a complete change of form*.

Having this thought — complete change of form — in mind, we may well ask ourselves, What is involved in the statement "looking on the glory of the Lord"? What will enable me to do this? What will detract me from it? A servant of the Lord now home in heaven used the phrase "occupation with Christ in glory." It surely involves that glorious MAN in His pathway here for the accomplishment of the will of God, and the present answer to it which God has given Him in the glory, becomes the absorbing interest of our hearts. We may be sure that the Holy Spirit will ever direct our attention to Him whether as seen in the Gospels or in the Epistles. It is the same blessed perfect Man, the delight of whose heart was the accomplishment of the will of God, who is set before us as our lesson book today.

Let us consider again the important word to the Roman believers-

"And be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." Romans 12: 2.

It is certain that this verse contains the secret of all prosperity (and negatively, poverty) in the things of God. How impossible it is for any one of us to move here in the interests of Christ and in the path of the will of God if we are holding the holy things of God in one hand and the things of this unholy world in the other. We understand the prefix "con" to mean "together with," and the prefix "trans" — "apart from." Why should saints of God desire to be "together with" this world out of which God has delivered us at such infinite cost? Our renewed minds are, through grace, capable of running on new lines — spiritual, heavenly and eternal. Why should we desire to be conformed to the ways and habits, the dress and activities of a world which is under the domination of Satan? We have been introduced into a new circle of interests as far removed from the principles of this world as the heavens are above the earth, as we so often sing-

"Our hearts by Thee are set,
On brighter things above."

Let us allow these heavenly things to control our minds, and thus happily grow more like Christ. God has graciously unfolded to us something of His eternal purpose; His counsel; His ways; the truth of the assembly and of the house of God; the kingdom; the world-to-come; the eternal state; and has given to us His Holy Spirit that we may know the blessedness of these wonderful things now!

If these are the chief interest of our souls there will be no question as to our being *practically* transformed, and the features of Christ will be seen in us more and more, for the glory and pleasure of God and for the peace and satisfaction of our souls. Thus we shall prove that the will of God *is* good, and acceptable and perfect. What a transformation takes place when *His* will becomes our guide, and we daily seek to be subject to Him as the One who has rescued us from this present evil world, and has given us the privilege of serving Him instead of pursuing our own wills!

May we seek to be governed by the truth as thus presented to us, occupied with our Lord Jesus Christ and "the things which are Jesus Christ's" (Philippians 2: 21). In this way shall we grow to be like Him, and be marked by the features which marked Him when in this world for the glory of God. Thus we shall indeed "render . . . unto God the things that are God's."