

The Secrets of Wisdom

Job 11: 1-9; 1 Cor. 2: 6-10; Rom. 11: 33-36.

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May/June 1959

In turning to these Scriptures I have in mind to pass on a complementary word with regard to the vastness of the scope of the Divine revelation which came out so remarkably in our Bible reading this afternoon. We were affected, too, by the grace of our God in calling the great apostle Paul in order that he might be the vessel to pass on to us the administration of the mystery, that we might be enlightened in relation to the realm where God is working for His glory by Christ Jesus. Through infinite grace we are called to have part in the assembly, the vessel formed to contain the light of that revelation. We are thus enabled to walk here in the light of that administration — a word which means the house-law — whilst we have in prospect the day of the display of the glory and ultimately the eternal day. We know that the assembly will have her part in the new heaven in that day which Scripture calls "the day of God," (2 Pet. 3: 12). With a view to both contrasting and building up a little on that line, I have ventured to read these well-known verses to you.

The outstanding feature of the book of Job is the introduction of a Divine problem to which three men, searching human wisdom, endeavour to find a solution. Beloved, everything in the Divine circle is a mystery. It is all a problem so far as human wisdom is concerned, and God intended that it should be so; but in His wonderful grace He has given us the ability by His Spirit to understand these Divine mysteries. That is why these things are called mysteries, to be understood only by those who have the Holy Spirit of God as Teacher. They are utterly beyond the natural intellect of the men of this world. So these three men, apparently the wisest men of the day in which they lived, attempted to solve the problem of the sufferings of Job by their combined wisdom, but they were utterly unable to find the key to it. We are all well acquainted with that which befell Job. His wealth gone; his family of ten children gone; his health gone, and this once great man is found sitting in ashes and scraping himself with a potsherd. God allowed every difficulty which can come upon us in our pathway through this world to beset Job. All our testings come in these three spheres in our personal history with God; either in our business, or in our families, or in our health. We do not speak of service in the assembly but of our personal, secret history with God. We know that Satan was the cause of it all so far as the immediate circumstances were concerned, but we must remember that God was behind Satan. Do not let us think that Satan can take things out of the hands of God in relation to any one of His children; not for one moment can he do this. We know from chapter 1 that it was not Satan who raised the issue at all; it was God Himself. God discerned that there was something lacking in Job, wonderful man though he was, and God desires that defect to be remedied for, although God did say Job was a perfect man, yet He wanted to make him more perfect. You may tell that is not good English but we shall see how it comes to pass in this book. God said in chapter 1 he was perfect but in the last chapter he was more perfect. I judge he was perfect **without** at the outset of this history, but he was perfect also **within** at the end. Not only was his walk right, but ultimately his heart was right. The fly causing the stink in the ointment was Job's thinking that his righteousness was of himself, but he had to learn it was altogether of God and, as the result of this severe trial, he did learn that lesson. Satan was just the being for God to use in order to accomplish what He desired to do in Job. God allows things to work that way at times and it worked with Job. Satan attempted to turn Job against God, but all he succeeded in doing was to destroy that one thing in Job which God wanted removed. Let us not forget that God is behind Satan,

whatever He allows him to bring against His servants.

Eliphaz the Temanite, and Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite, these three wise men, the princes of the day in which they lived, conspired to show Job where he was wrong. Elihu we leave out for the moment, for he was the one man wise enough to speak for God. Eliphaz was an experimentalist; he would have solved this problem by what he had learned through the sight of his eyes as he said, "Even as I have seen," (Job 4: 8). Much knowledge has been gained in this world by men who watch birds and animals, and who by observing their different habits have a good idea of the things which mark them in the environment in which they live. Like Eliphaz, they have received their knowledge by **observation**.

Bildad says as it were, "It does not matter what we have seen with our eyes in our day, we ought to listen to those who went before us and who know better than we do." So he says, "For enquire, I pray thee, of the former age," (Job 8: 8). Bildad had received his knowledge by **inculcation**, preferring to use his ears in preference to his eyes.

Zophar scorned what was obvious to the eyes of some people, nor was he interested in what his forbears had taught; he thought he was clever enough to solve this problem himself as he said, "the spirit of my understanding causeth me to answer," (Job 20: 3). We venture to suggest that he preferred to use his own wisdom by what men call **intuition**.

Eliphaz used his **eyes**; Bildad used his **ears**; and Zophar used his **brains**. Not one of them found the solution to this problem by human wisdom however that wisdom was acquired. How rightly it has been pressed upon us that only by the Spirit of the Father dwelling in our souls can we understand these Divine mysteries, and which we now have intelligently in our hearts as Divine light. Had it depended upon our eyes, or our ears, or our brains, what should we have known of these wonderful things? Did not our Lord say, "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and has revealed them unto babes," (Matt. 11: 25). How content we are to be in the position of babes, quite prepared to listen to what God Himself would tell us of these things.

Eliphaz was an **experimentalist**; Bildad was a **traditionalist**; but Zophar was a **materialist**. We turn again to his words, "and that He would shew thee the secrets of wisdom, that they are double to that which is," (Job 11: 6). Zophar of course thought he knew all about them, but he did not know the first thing about them. This present creation is a provisional state of things, and every one of us can observe the visible things of heaven and of earth by our natural senses as we read in Romans 1: 20, but the secrets of wisdom are "double to that which is."

Behind this material creation, God is working out that which cannot be discerned by natural eyes or understood by natural intellect. While all can observe natural phenomena around us on every hand, only those who are taught of God can receive the spiritual things which underlie the material creation, "the secrets of wisdom . . . double to that which is." God is not only seeking to interest us in the material creation, where all with ordinary intelligence can be instructed, He has given us light as to why He brought this creation into being. He is instructing us to-day concerning that which lies behind it all, the working out of His eternal plan for His own glory and the glory of Christ, involving the blessing and ultimate glory of each one of us. I believe these things to be "the double."

Zophar goes on to say, "Know therefore that God exacteth of thee less than thine iniquity deserveth." How this man in his materialism blunders on! God is not an exacting God and was not exacting anything from Job because of his sin. Zophar, like the other two, had been trying to persuade Job that God was dealing with him because of some secret sin, but we know from the outset of this

book that God had said Job was righteous; quite the contrary to the deduction of this materialist. But he goes on, demanding of Job, "Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?" Obviously in that day, and particularly to Zophar, the answer is found in a word of two letters, NO. We must write "no" over this chapter so far as Zophar and his two friends are concerned. If Zophar came to us to-day and in his sarcastic manner should say to us, "Canst thou by searching find out God?" are we going to say NO? Thank God we are not. We can find Him out; yea, we have found Him out. We each in our measure know something of the details of His plan, that which gives expression to the desires of His heart and that which He is working out for His own glory. We know why He created the universe, what He is doing with it today, and what He will yet do with it in the world to come. We may thank God that we have by searching found Him out, but we have not used the means which Zophar attempted to use, or we should not know any more about God than he did. We **have** found Him out by the Holy Spirit, for "the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God"; or "the depths of God" as we know the word means.

We listen again to Zophar demanding of Job, "It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? Deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea," (vv. 8, 9). This is the only place besides Eph. 3 where these four dimensions are referred to in Scripture, so far as I know. Truly the knowledge of God is as high as heaven, but we have ability to rise to these heavenly things as we have seen; "deeper than hell" would carry us in thought to the cross, where the Son of God went down into death in order that He might overthrow every force opposed to the will of God, and lay a foundation upon which God could righteously work for the satisfaction of His heart. "The measure . . . longer than the earth" we believe refers to the counsel of God before time began and which will reach to the new scene when time has ended. "Broader than the sea" would take in all things in heaven and all things on earth, headed up in Christ, and soon to be displayed in the world to come. So beloved, we have found out God. We note another interesting point here. Zophar speaks of the height, and depth, and length, and breadth; whilst the apostle Paul, writing under Divine inspiration, speaks of the breadth, and length, and depth and height; quite the other way round, for they were working from two different ends. Trying to reach what is spiritual through that which is material is labour in vain, but beginning with Christ in glory, the centre in Whom all is established, leads to enlightenment in the deep things of God. Christ at the centre of a circle of glory is the spot from which we reach out in thought to the breadth and length and depth and height, and He is the One Whom the apostle desired might have the central place in our hearts, and he directed his prayer to that end.

Moving on now to the verses we read in 1 Corinthians 2, we have the New Testament answer to these words of Zophar. Writing to these clever Corinthians, Paul reminds them of the Divine sphere into which they had been brought, and of what he, as used of God, had ministered in that sphere. "Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect," (verse 6). This word "perfect" means "full grown." Now the Corinthians had been saying that what the apostle taught was very elementary and they no doubt thought they knew far more than he could tell them. But the apostle shows them that they had been so engrossed in the wisdom of this world that they were not able to take in that which was connected with the hidden wisdom of God. We do well to lay this to heart, for we do not discern the things of God in or by the wisdom of this world. Indeed, the more place we give to the wisdom of this world, the less capable we shall be of understanding the hidden wisdom of God. That was where the Corinthians had failed, and Paul had to write to them, "And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual but as unto carnal . . . ye are yet carnal . . . and walk as men," (1 Cor. 3: 1-3). It was among those who were perfect, those who had grown in the things of God, that he speaks of this hidden wisdom, Divine wisdom which could only be communicated by Divine means and apprehended by Divine power in their souls. We are left in no doubt what that power was, it was the Holy Spirit of God.

"Communicating spiritual (things) by spiritual (means)," (verse 13, New Translation).

In communicating these spiritual things he did not do so by "the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought," (verse 6). With all their plans and inventions, and the objectives to which the wise men of this world are straining, God has written over it all — NOTHING. The day will come when it will all vanish like a puff of smoke. Why waste our time upon it? Only what has been of God, what He has planned and is carrying out for His own glory will remain; but that is just what the wise men of this world know nothing about, as we see from these verses. "But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world for our glory." So far as I know this is the only thing ever said in the New Testament to be ordained for our glory. We read of that which God ordained for **His** glory and for the glory of Christ, and through grace He brings us into that sphere, but here it says that He ordained this hidden wisdom for our glory. Oh! that we valued it more. "Which none of the princes of this world knew; for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory," (verse 8). It does not say they did not know Christ, but they did not know of this hidden wisdom, and the result of not knowing was they crucified the Lord of glory. They did in their day just what Satan did in a lesser way with Job. In trying to destroy Job as a perfect man and destroy his faith in God, he only did what God wanted to do with him; and in seeking to destroy the Son of God the princes of this world did but carry out what God had determined for the fulfilment of His own thoughts and the securing for Himself that which He had ordained before the foundation of the world. You will remember how these two things are seen together in Acts 2: 23, "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." Truly as one has said, "the fell destroyer will ultimately learn that he has, all unwittingly, played into the hands of eternal love." So much for the boasted wisdom of this world.

We reach now the New Testament answer to the three friends of Job, and the uselessness of the wisdom of this world, no matter in what day or under what circumstances it intrudes itself into the things of God. We read in 1 Cor. 2: 9, "But as it is written, Eye hath not seen" — goodbye, Eliphaz; "Nor ear heard" — goodbye, Bildad; "Neither have entered into the heart of man" — goodbye, Zophar. Beloved, we do not need them to unfold to us the depths of God; they do not know them and they are all wiped off in one stroke in this verse. I remind you of a correlative passage to this in Matthew 13: 16, "But blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear." Then in verse 51, "Jesus saith unto them, Have ye understood all these things? They say unto Him, Yea, Lord." How favoured we are with eyes to see, ears to hear, and hearts to understand, while all the wise princes of this world go blundering on without the slightest idea of where they are going or what the end is going to be. We can go on calmly in the light of what God is doing, waiting for the next event in these Divine movements without the slightest fear of these movements breaking down or of that end not being reached. All is in the hands of God, administered by Christ and effected by the Holy Spirit. In the light of it all we are moving on to the grand climax which, so far as the present condition of things is concerned, will be at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ to take us to be forever with Himself. "God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit; for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God."

Turning to our last Scripture in Romans 11, we have a third reference to Divine wisdom. In Job 11, we have read of "the secrets of wisdom," and in 1 Cor. 2 of the "wisdom of God in a mystery," and here we have "the riches . . . of wisdom" (verse 33). In these three chapters of Romans 9, 10, and 11, we have an outline of the dealings of God with His earthly people Israel. He has turned aside from them as a nation to-day, in order that He may form the assembly by the present gospel going forth to both Jews and Gentiles as we read in Romans 16: 25, "the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the

revelation of the mystery." In Romans 9, we read of His past dealings with them; in Romans 10, His present dealings; and in Romans 11, His future dealings. In each chapter we have a reference to Christ as we should expect. In Romans 9: 5 it is a reference to His birth, "of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, Who is over all, God blessed for ever." That looks backwards. In Romans 10: 7, "Who shall descend into the deep?" (That is, to bring up Christ again from the dead). That is His present place in resurrection, as verse 9 assures us. In Romans 11: 26, "There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer." That obviously looks on to the future. We see in Ephesians the breadth of Divine counsel and we read there that all things in heaven and on earth are headed up in Christ. These three chapters in Romans deal with the earthly side of the inheritance, involving the restoration of Israel and their taking the lead among the nations as the head and not the tail in the establishment of the world to come. Christ maintains a link with them according to these three chapters, and He it is Who will eventually deliver them and put them into their place at His appearing. Christ is the centre of all, all is headed up in Him, and he will bring all into line with the counsel of God.

As the heart of the apostle is moved by this wonderful unfolding of the working of God, he is constrained to break forth into this note of praise, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" Wisdom is resource to carry out the details of counsel. "How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!" That is what perplexed Eliphaz and Bildad and Zophar; to them indeed the ways of God were unsearchable, and past finding out. If the apostle says the same thing here, he obviously refers to the realm of human reasoning, as his next words show. "For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been His counsellor?" What a display of the greatness of God, His resources, His riches, His wisdom, His knowledge! He has planned it all, and He has sufficient resources to effect it all, and at last it will all eventuate in the display of His glory in the world to come, so far as this universe is concerned. "For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things; to Whom be glory for ever. Amen." "Of Him" may be a reference to God the Father and Source of all; "through Him" a reference to the Son, the active instrumental Agent in bringing it all about; "to Him" a reference to the Holy Spirit Who secures all and holds it for the pleasure of the Godhead. This is the realm in which the Godhead is working, a realm utterly beyond the understanding of any human intellect. We are glad to take the place of babes in relation to it, so that with subject spirits we may be taught by the Holy Spirit Who searches out for us the depths of God, to the end that we may know something of the secrets and the mystery and the riches of wisdom. It will eventuate in the establishment of the assembly in glory, and the restoration of Israel with the Gentiles all in their places surrounding them. All will be seen in their rightful places in the world to come and it will call forth a note of praise to God "to Whom be glory for ever. Amen."