

The Word of God as to Individuals and the Assembly

from Memorials of the ministry of G. V. Wigram.

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Reader, I would ask of you a question. — What place has the word of God in our spiritual blessing?

Firstly, as to the *individual soul*. The Lord spake (in John 5) thus, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on Him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation" (the Greek has "judgment," and not condemnation); "but is passed from death unto life." (v. 24.) And the Holy Spirit wrote by Peter, "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." (1 Peter 1: 23.) "The word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you." (v. 25.) And what is written in James confirms this: "The Father of lights (James 1: 17). . . of His own will begat He us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of His creatures (v. 18); wherefore . . . receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls (v 21); but be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves" (v. 22.) And Peter adds as to spiritual growth: "Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby, if so be that ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious." (1 Peter 2: 1-3.) In the passages I have referred to, *His word* is spoken of as God's means of producing blessings.

Then, secondly — *As to the assembly down here* — scene of the sway of God, whether in government, or as a house, etc. How was it brought into being but by the coming of the promise of the Father, and the preaching through Peter, James, and John, of Jesus as made Lord and Christ on high, with forgiveness of sins, and the gift of the Holy Spirit to all those who judged themselves and confessed their sins, as many as the Lord called? (Acts 2: 32-40.) Then they that gladly received His word were baptised; and the same day three thousand souls were added. "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (vv. 41-47); thus the company was formed. As Peter said when, with the keys of the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 16: 19), he opened to the Gentiles (Acts 10: 34): "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him. The word which He sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all:), that word ye know." "While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all them which heard the word." (chap. 10: 34-44.) God wrought this through His own word.

Paul, too, (Rom. 10: 8-17), "The word is nigh thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach. . . . So then faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God." This as to individual blessing.

See also as to the assembly (Eph. 3), how that which was pre-eminently His gospel, the mystery (Eph. 3: 3-10), and (Eph. 5: 23-27) the setting up of the assembly, as the body and bride of Christ. "Christ is the Head of the Church, and He is the Saviour of the body." He "loved the Church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." (compare Eph. 1: 8-23.) All this was by the word of God through

Paul. Again, in the marvellous description which he gives of the Church, as the Church of God on earth (1 Cor. 12 - 14), how is everything of blessing, power, correcting, and setting right, etc., all made to depend upon the Holy Spirit revealing the mind of the Lord through the truth of God, and word of the apostle. The simple truth, however, of 1 Cor. 11 settles the whole question. How can two walk together unless they be agreed? God, the true and living God, had rallied a people upon earth, in the name of the Lord Jesus; and had made it a habitation through the Spirit for Himself; those in the house must either be clean, and walk according to His mind, revealed by His apostles and prophets, or Himself was there to judge, and cause that "many among them should be weak and sickly, and many sleep." Paul, with his word, had to explain God's dealings with those at Corinth to them. The individuals in the house should discern the Lord's body, and should discern how far they are in their walk consistent with His death, which they set forth or announce; for all practical inconsistency where God dwells comes into judgment; if by the action of the assembly, then with the view of healing; but if not by the assembly, then of God, who will judge His own people here, in love, in order that we should not be condemned with the world. (vv. 23-34.)

God wills things, and needs not to speak. But generally you find in the context His apostle or a prophet is near, to explain that which occurs to man, as in the case of Ananias (Acts 5), and of Paul to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 11) It was by the *word* of the Lord that a Peter, John, or Paul, through the Holy Spirit, saw through and explained circumstances, guided saints and assemblies, and gave judgments or sentence upon wickedness, and these judgments stood firm. The word of the Lord changes not.

If any say that we are incompetent to do this, I refer them to 1 Cor. 10: 1, and to verses 12 and 13 following it: "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." A most remarkable verse after such evils had been shown! If any say, "But how?" The answer is ready in Heb. 4: 12-16; and, again, in 2 Tim. 3: 13-17. Or is not the Word the sword of the Spirit still? (Eph. 6: 17; Rev. 1: 16, Rev. 2: 16, Rev. 19: 15.) Paul's authority to set aside the thoughts of some may serve us, too, while following Christ; for, it is not dead. (1 Cor. 14: 36, 37.) Truly, as in the parable of the sower, there are four effects of the word. If it comes where Satan rules, it is swallowed up and disappears. If where the world and the flesh are not judged, the world and the flesh, and not it, triumph. But it alone is the seed fruit-bearing when it, through grace, falls into a poor sinner's heart.

Passages might be multiplied. But all spiritual blessing is of God, and so is His grace in man or in an assembly, and it has to be inwrought by His word through the Spirit; all failure is man's fault, through the world, flesh, and Satan not having been judged, nor God sought to.

When I read such passages of Scripture as those above, and others like them, I know not how to measure my own littleness, so infinitely blessed as I am in Christ; or how to fulfil this my new responsibility. I know not how to grasp the wonderful admirableness of my place in the body of which Christ is the Head; nor the solemn blessing and responsibility Godward, of our having been called to bear His name and to show out His character on earth, holding forth the word of life. But God will maintain His own position as God; and wherever He is, His own character will shine out too, whether He be acting Himself directly, or whether He be acting through the assembly, or through us individually (and here Phil. 2: 12,13 is indeed consolation to us). Yet what is produced upon one's mind by all this, is a something very different from what is awakened in most minds when "ECCLESIASTICAL DISCIPLINE" is spoken of by men. God, and the assembly and myself in the one case; and man settling things for others, is, alas! too often all that is found in the other case. I do not mean that what is of God does this, but that *in the now worn and hackneyed state of men's minds,*

the term, "ecclesiastical discipline" (most properly belonging to the lawyer), does too often evoke things and ideas which are not of the Spirit, but contrary to the word, in our poor minds.

As matter of fact, "ecclesiastical" (though not occurring in N. T.) is merely a dry term for of the "assembly," and the word "discipline" never once occurs in the New Testament

The mind of man, and the mind of the present generation in particular, being considered, and the way that the page of all that is called *ecclesiastical* in history (and, alas! now, and like to be so to the end), is the record of the vilest and wickedest things, it seems to me a term calculated to ensnare the unguarded into, and to confirm the mind in, false ideas; and I doubt whether, as used commonly, it is not altogether too narrow a word in its meaning for the large and wide range which it ought to cover. (Away from books I can only count upon Bagster's smaller authorities for a check to my mind.)

I should define PAIDEIA, education, training up, nurture of children (Eph. 6: 4); instruction (2 Tim. 3: 16); chastening (Heb. 12: 5, 7, 8, 10); and in like manner,

PAIDEUO (the verb), to educate, instruct children; to teach, admonish, instruct, improve; to instruct by chastening. The primary idea is "PAIS," a child, servant, slave, and all needful for the proper education of such.

A father or mother may know, and ought to know, that the rod *may* be necessary for a child, though many a parent finds that with early training and prayers the rod has never made its appearance in their circle. But with the word, "discipline," the rod assumes a place of pre-eminent, forwardness to most minds; as some of old have said, "No school without a good rod; no nursery or private schoolroom without its rod." In point of fact I find it is by very many limited to excision.* It is not the surgeon's service only, nor it, with the physician's action superadded; according to the extracts above, it includes *very much more*, both as to the individual and the assembly, Now that is *not* the aspect of God towards His assembly or the individuals in it. As God, He solemnly calls upon us as individuals to discern our own selves, and to put away the evil, and every evil, everything not according to Christ. He calls upon the assembly, too, to discern its ways (and the ways of all in it) and of itself as a whole, and to avoid His having to express His mind to their, to our, shame and grief. Yet if forced by our crookedness to "use" the rod, whether His own or that entrusted to an apostle, it is that we may be delivered from evil; it is protective to His name, but curative of His children.

*Jehovah hates putting away (Mal. 2: 16), even He who said "Lo-ammi, not my people," to her who had been called, "Ammi, my people;" and "Lo ruhamah, not pitied," to her who had been called "Ruhamah, pitied." (Hosea 1 and 2) He ought, and can, and He will, put away persons from Him, if they put not away their sin and bad ways.

God ought surely to be vindicated. His being as God, His character, the mercy and grace, and mercies bestowed upon us, all demand it. More than this, He will have it so, and His Son, Lord of all, is looking down upon us to secure it; for He is not indifferent to the will, honour and glory, of His Father. And the Holy Spirit, too, is in us, and among us all, to make this good as our privilege and life; good against our own flesh, and the world, and Satan.

Solemn but strong grounds for us to live up to. His purpose for us is to live to Him who died for us and rose again, that they which live might live to Him. (2 Cor. 5)

The word of God, *in nature*, was first creative, all after God's own order. Held to, it would have been preservative (more mighty to preserve than the serpent to mar). Neglected, it turned to judgment, yet through grace was, ere judgment came forth, supplanted by the word about "*the seed of the woman bruising the serpent's head,*" germ and security of victory complete to all that hold it.

In the continuation of the fallen creation, the word of God, *in providence*, pledged itself in blessing, but this was in the rainbow after the deluge. Again it showed itself *in government*, with a people temporarily redeemed and saved from Egypt. *In prophecy*, it stretched onwards, in God's patient goodness, to a rebel race, to tell of Him, "the Word of God," that was to come, the King expected for the kingdom, and the Giver of eternal life — Himself eternal life — and the one grand subject of the written Word.

We have, through faith in the Word, Himself our Head on high, and down here His Spirit, token of present fellowship with Him, of safe conduct through this life and of eternal glory. But the Bible! What a gift it is to us, and how to be prized in a day of infidel myths like the present.

The education of the believer goes on from his new birth. He learns that God, who is rich in mercy, for the great love wherewith He loved us, has quickened us together with Christ, raised us up together, and made us to sit together in Him in heaven. On the other hand, self, and all that attached to self previously, he has escaped from entirely, as looked upon by God as having been crucified together with Christ; died together with Him, and been buried together with Him. So far, *in principle*, ALL is sure to faith, and by the Holy Spirit. We reckon ourselves dead to sin, as well as alive to God through Jesus Christ. But we have, therefore, to be in practice consistent with both these blessings. As individuals we are set in mercy. The assembly stands in grace and peace. The babes have to learn; the young men to overcome; and the fathers to rest in Him that is from the beginning. Live by faith within the veil, and the wilderness, with all its sorrows, turns for a testimony to you. Rom. 5: 1-11, shows us part of our schooling; so does Heb. 12: 5-13, and 2 Peter 1: 5-14. Truly we are still in the six thousand years "war," but greater is He that is for us than all that are against us. It is the assembly *militant* now, but soon, how soon! will the victory and the triumph supplant the battle of life. May we quit ourselves like men, strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.

Philippians 1 gives the visible walk of Paul according to his full communion of life with Christ; all full of Christ, and all for Christ, though down here, and himself (Paul) in weakness.

Then Phil. 2 gives us the perfect walk of Paul's Lord, the Christ, in its mighty circle. From the throne where He was worshipped, down to earth, and death of the cross, and back again to His reward on high and on the throne.

And then Phil. 3 shows the inward springs of Paul's course, the only perfection which he or we can now attain (though perfected for God in Christ); namely, forgetting things behind, and stretching out to what lies before, toward the goal, and for the prize to which he was called — Paul's *one* thing, that he did.

As a conqueror now, he could say, "All things work together for good to me." The principles on which the Holy Spirit acts are all found in the written word; and the light is so clear as to the connection between principle and practice, and as to the soul or assembly walking with God in the Spirit, and therefore blessed in its actions, or walking in the flesh and according to man, and therefore getting correction and chastening.