

He that hearkeneth unto counsel  
is wise. *Proverbs xii, 15.*

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The Counsel of the Lord that  
shall stand. *Proverbs xix, 21.*



**T**HE first address seems to me to indicate the normal work of the Spirit of God—i. e., to increase in our souls the sense of the greatness of Christ.

The second article indicates one of the results of this exaltation of Christ in our souls,—the love of the brethren,—and how the Enemy would seek to destroy this.

And the third, written in a time of Church difficulty exhorts us as to the secret and importance of endurance.

All three search us as to the spirit of our minds.

“Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind.” 1 Pet. 1:13.

W. J. Y.



## THE PRE-EMINENCE OF CHRIST.

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Colossians 1: 5-18.

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“And He is the head of the body, the Church; who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things He might have the pre-eminence.”

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One would desire, dear friends, that what is said of Isaac might be true in a distinct and definite way to-night of every heart in this room.

It is said of Isaac that he “waxed great, and went forward and grew until he became very great.” (Gen. 26: 13.)

One would desire that the experience of our hearts continually should be that the Lord Jesus Christ should wax greater and greater in the vision of our souls. Not that He Himself personally could ever be greater than He was at Bethlehem. He, Himself, as to His own inherent greatness, “is the same yesterday, to-day and forever”; but in our apprehension of His greatness one would like that Scripture to be true with every heart, “that he waxed greater and greater until he became very great.” The wise men of the East knew that the blessed Person Who had entered this world from Heaven had all greatness in Him, so that they came to where the little Child was, and kneeled down and worshipped Him. They said in effect what David says, as they kneeled down with a conscious sense of the greatness of Christ, “Thine, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory, and the victory, and

the majesty . . . and Thou art exalted as Head over all." (1 Chron. 29: 11.) They said that in their hearts, as they knelt down in the presence of the Lord Jesus as a little child.

Upon the Cross the thief said exactly the same thing in his heart, in the midst of the utmost humiliation and dishonor. The thief discerned that all the greatness was there; and he, also, said, "Thine, O Lord, is the greatness and the majesty," but one feels that we come to these things step by step, little by little. How one would prize one single thought in the heart of the greatness and the glory of Christ.

All spiritual movement, all growth and knowledge of God, springs from a conception of Christ. It does not spring from a mental ability to analyse the truths of Scripture. It springs from an apprehension in the affections of the majesty and glory of Christ, and it is on this line, dear friends, I would like to take up this passage where the Apostle says "that in all things He might have the pre-eminence." The <sup>DEPKS</sup>new translation of it is the same in effect, but perhaps clearer—"that in everything He might have the first place." That that glorious One Whom we know as our Saviour might in everything, in every sphere of activity that it is ours to touch, might stand there first, and that we might rank behind Him. It speaks in Chronicles (1 Chron. 12: 23) of how David received fifty thousand men who could keep rank, and it tells us why they could keep rank. They were not of a double heart. Every one of this fifty thousand men loved David, and he was at the head of them. They kept rank. That is the secret, dear brethren, of being in fellowship. The secret of being in fellowship is that we have not two hearts—one heart to love Christ, and the other heart to seek our own

will—and so it says they kept rank, every one of them.

Now this passage in Colossians indicates that we have a place. While the Lord Jesus Christ has the first place it implies that we have got a place. I would like to show that in everything that has to do with God and His interests that we have the privilege to have part in, the Lord Jesus Christ, as Man, takes the lead there. He steps into the front; He is first.

The first thing I would speak of is what is general. Every creature of God can have part in one thing. There is one thing true for everything, and that is, it is open to all to serve God. The inanimate creation serves Him. David says: "The heavens declare the glory of God."

Anyone who has any experience with God knows that everything was made to serve God, and so it is open, dear brethren, for us to serve God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, as man, steps into the front rank. He steps out right ahead of everybody, and He has the pre-eminence.

It is only said of Him, "Behold My Servant." (Isaiah 42: 1.) God says from Heaven, through the prophet Isaiah, "Just look at My Servant." That is the secret, dear brethren, of all service for God.—"Behold My Servant." What a Servant He was. The apostles are greatly impressed by it. In their prayer they speak of "Thy holy Servant, Jesus." Oh, what a sense they had in their hearts of how He was down here ministering to the will of God. That service was no legal service. He said, "Oh, how I love Thy law, and in it I meditate day and night." "I delight," says the Lord Jesus, "to do Thy will, O My God; yea, Thy law is within My heart." So the Lord Jesus trod this world

as God's Servant, serving Him from the heart, serving Him, dear brethren, even to death, as we see in the Garden. The Lord Jesus says, "Not My will." "Not My will!" He says, "I love My Master, I love Him." In becoming man the Lord Jesus took the servant's place. "Taking a bondman's form," Scripture says; and in that place how He served! He says, "I love My Master," and He served God right into death itself, doing His will. He was obedient, as says the Word, "Obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross." Untiring in His ministrations all through His journey. Serving, too, His own. He says to them, "I (your Lord and Master) am among you as One that serves." How He served them in stooping down to wash their feet. Serving them, too, in every way; and now, dear brethren, He has gone up into Heaven, and what is He doing there? Serving God there. It says, first of all, He was carried up into Heaven and sat on the right hand of God, and the disciples went everywhere, the Lord working with them, working still from there, still working as the blessed Servant of God, and He is going on with that service until He has put down all rule and authority. When everything that lifts itself up against God is dealt with by God's Servant what does He say then? "I will serve Him for ever." When that eternal day comes, right at the commencement of it, this is what is said, "The Son Himself will become subject" (the servant's place) "will become subject to Him Who has put all things in subjection to Him, that God may be all in all."

Now, dear brethren, we are to rank behind that glorious Servant. Whatever branch of service we may look at, He is the Servant Who is in the lead. He has got the first place.

We cannot serve—our service will not be worth anything—until we come behind Him.

One thinks of Mark in that way. Mark, you know, was converted—a young man just converted—and there sprang up in his soul a desire to serve the Lord. At that time Barnabas and Paul were about, and doubtless under the influence of Barnabas, Mark decided to go with them. What a thing it would be, no doubt he thought, to go out preaching the Gospel in the Company of Barnabas and Paul. How he would be able to come back, no doubt, with laurels. How he would be able to speak of exploits. All these things would be in the heart of a young man; and so, under the influence of Barnabas—under natural influences, not spiritual—he goes out to preach the Gospel with Paul and Barnabas, and serve. It says they had John as their minister—or their servant—but Mark had not any idea of what was involved in service, as we shall see.

They sailed to Cyprus, and they went across also to Salamis, and they came to Paphos, and there at Paphos they are met by “a sorcerer,” a “false prophet,” a “Jew,” “an enemy of all righteousness,” “a child of the devil.” Mark had not reckoned on that—all the subtle resources of the evil one arrayed against them—he had not reckoned on that. After that, it says that Paul went to Perga, in Pamphylia. One can understand Mark saying, “Paul, have a rest; this is terrible—place after place, activity, conflict, service all the time,” and he gets as far as Perga, in Pamphylia, and he goes back. Poor Mark! Through natural influences he had taken service of a public character before he was ready for it.

He goes back discouraged and having failed. No laurels! No conversions! There he is; and



Barnabas afterwards says, "We will take him again." "No," says Paul. "He did not think it good to take him who went back from the work." Paul says, "We will not take him," and they separated about that.

What of Mark? There is Mark, feeling his failure and discouraged. He had not read Isaiah. He had not read that 42nd chapter: "Behold My servant whom I uphold, Mine elect in whom My soul delighteth." "He shall not fail or be discouraged, till He have set judgment in the earth, the isles shall wait for His law." The Spirit of God directed the heart of Mark to these Scriptures, and as he thought of God's Servant, the Lord Jesus, as He trod that wonderful pathway of service, the fire burned, his heart burned within him, and his heart moved out towards that blessed Servant. Step by step he followed His path, and the spirit of God came behind his pen and he wrote the Gospel of Mark. He wrote about the pathway of service, the like of which there never was, and he did not write historically—he wrote it from his heart. It was his delight to think of such a Servant as that, and later on, ~~probably when Paul had read that Gospel, after Mark had had long years of meditating upon the pathway of the service of Jesus,~~ Paul says to Timothy, "Bring Mark, for he is profitable to me for the ministry." A man who appreciated Christ like that will do—he will bring profit to the ministry; he will bring not profit to himself, but profit to the ministry. That is the secret, dear brethren, of any service that is of any account in the sight of God, and so one would like to leave that point there. All service of any kind has only value and power as it is done under the hand of God's Servant.



Now I would like to divide up the service of God in a few ways in detail.

There is one way in which we can serve—that is, as in the character of shepherds. That is one form of service.

If you were to read through from Abel onward, you would find that nearly all the great servants of God began there. They began their service as shepherds. Abel is the first. It says Abel was a keeper of sheep, and so it is right through. Amos says, "I was no prophet; God took me from following the sheep." They all began there. David began there. Moses began there. Abraham began there. "Thy servants," they say, "are shepherds, both we and our fathers." One would like to commend that service to us all, but it can never be taken up unless it is taken up under the influence of the Chief Shepherd—the Chief Shepherd, the Shepherd that is right in the front, the Shepherd that leads all other shepherds. That is how Peter speaks. Peter says, "When the Chief Shepherd shall appear." Ah! Peter's heart was moved. These things in Scripture, dear brethren, are not simply dry statements of fact; behind them is the heart of Peter. Peter, speaking about shepherds, says, "When the Chief Shepherd." What remembrances that would bring up in the heart of Peter. How he would think of the Lord Jesus here on earth as that Good Shepherd. How he would think of His activities of a shepherd character, how he would think of Him taking the lambs in His bosom. His mind would go back, and he would think how the Lord folded the lambs gently in His bosom. How he would think, too, of the occasion when they came out to take the Lord, and in a true shepherd character He stood in front of the sheep, and He said, "If

ye seek Me let these go their way." How he would think before that of a multitude of sheep that were gathered together—five thousand, besides women and children—and the Lord, with a shepherd's heart, had compassion on the sheep not having a shepherd, and He says in effect, "I will be their Shepherd." Micah prophesies, "He shall stand and feed in the strength of Jehovah," and the Lord Jesus stood there and fed them. All this Peter has in his heart.

Then he would think of how after the Lord Jesus came up from the dead He sent that message, "Go tell My disciples and Peter." Ah! Peter's heart was moved. "Go tell My disciples and Peter." Peter was a sheep that was going astray. He says, "We were as sheep going astray, but are returned to the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls." How the Lord came after Peter again. He said, "The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared unto Simon." How Peter would think of that interview when the Lord showed him what a true shepherd was. Then He said to Peter, "Now, Peter, you be a shepherd; you feed My lambs, Peter; feed My sheep, shepherd My sheep."

All Peter's shepherd activities sprang from his knowledge and appreciation of the Chief Shepherd; and so it is, dear friends, to-day. Whatever shepherd work is undertaken that is of any value, is undertaken under the influence of the Chief Shepherd, and it is a most important service — never more important than to-day.

In the prophet Micah, after he had spoken of the Lord as a Shepherd that feeds His flock in the majesty of the Lord, we are told that, "When the Assryian shall come into our land"

(that mighty scattering power that would break up the people of God) "we will raise up against him seven shepherds and eight principal men." The prophet says when these mighty hordes of Assyrians, with their horses and chariots, come down to our land we will meet them with seven shepherds. That is not man's way, is it? That is God's way. That is what we need, dear brethren, with the scattering influences of evil coming into our land. If, in our local gatherings, there is working the influence of the wolf that would scatter the sheep, let each heart say, "We will raise up against him seven shepherds." That will meet it. The power of the wolf is met by the shepherd spirit, and so one would just like to leave that point there, with the Lord Jesus as the Chief Shepherd at the head of all shepherds, giving character to their service.

Now I would like to come to another service which is open to the saints, and that is the service of Levites. In the Book of Numbers you see this, that all the Levites were engaged carrying everything connected with the tabernacle system. It was their work to carry it. The Ark, the altars, the veil, the curtains, the rings, the taches, the pins. They were all listed. The Levites' work and service was to carry all through the wilderness to the Land. How could they do it? How could such a service be properly cared for? The Spirit of God says, "~~Eleazer, the son of Aaron, he shall be the chief of the chiefs of the Levites.~~" The ~~New Translation~~ is, "Eleazer, the son of Aaron the priest, he shall be the prince of the princes of the Levites."

Right ahead of all the other Levites there would stand the prince of the Levites, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ. In everything, it

says, "He has the pre-eminence." So the Lord Jesus stands as the Prince of the princes of the Levites. We may be seeking in God's grace and favor to do Levitical work, to carry the Lord's interests through this wilderness scene. It may be a very small part given us to carry—it may be only a pin, only a ring, just that which will help to keep things down or bind things together, but most important things. We can never carry them unless under the influence of the Prince of Levites. How blessedly the Lord carried everything through this scene for God. Wherever there was anything that belonged to the tabernacle how carefully He picked it up and carried it right to the end. Take, for instance, Luke 7. There was in the house of Simon a little piece of brass that belonged to the tabernacle (manifest in the judgment of sin in the woman's soul), and Simon the Pharisee (he was no Levite) would have got rid of that piece of brass. Not so the Lord. He picked it up and carried it. He says, "That is Mine." He covered it, He put His wing over it, He protected it. Later on, in the 12th John, there was the alabaster box of ointment that belonged to the tabernacle. Judas was not a Levite—he had not a single Levitical instinct in him. He would sell it. The Lord Jesus, the Prince of Levites, says, "Let her alone." "I want that." Now, dear brethren, we cannot take up Levitical work of any description unless it is under the blessed influence of the Prince of Levites. He has the first place. If we are not behind Him we are not in place at all. If it is not done in His blessed spirit it is not done at all.

Now I would leave that and pass on to another sphere of service that is open to all the

people of God, and that is the service of priesthood. Perhaps someone says, "Oh! I thought they were just a special class that were priests according to God." No, dear brethren, all the redeemed say, "Thou hast made us kings and priests unto God and His Father." All saints are priests to take up the service of God, but we can never exercise priestly service rightly unless it is under the influence and direction of the One Who is called the "Great High Priest." There is one Priest, dear brethren, stands out right in front of all the other priests, right in the lead. "In everything," it says, "having the first place," and so, if we are going to take up priestly service, how shall we do it unless it is under the influence of Christ, that Great High Priest, Who is over the House of God. What a Priest He is!

Priestly service has two distinct characters. One is from man to God, to draw near to God on behalf of man, to present those sacrifices in which He delights—that is one side of priesthood. Peter knew all about that. He says, "A holy priesthood." That is the service of the priesthood towards God. Then the other part of priesthood is that the priest comes out from the presence of God, and he draws near to man. He does it in a dual capacity. On the one hand he carries to man the compassion of the heart of God. What marks a priest is that he has compassion on them that are ignorant and out of the way. The other feature is that "his lips keep knowledge, and they seek the law at his mouth." Now the Lord Jesus Christ is that Great High Priest in both characters, the holy Priest and the royal Priest that Peter speaks of—a royal Priest towards men. The Gospel of John presents Christ as

the holy Priest approaching God with the sacrifices. The Gospel of Luke presents Christ as the royal Priest coming out from God with the compassions of the heart of God for those who are ignorant and out of the way, and also as the One Whose lips keep knowledge. How the Lord stands in the 11th John, and again in the 17th, as the Great High Priest in that holy character with the priestly garments of the 28th Exodus—every one of them—on. The gold is there, the purple is there, the scarlet is there, and the fine twined linen ephod is there, the breastplate is there, and the shoulder pieces are there, on both of which are the names of all the people of God. The Lord stands there in full priestly garb. How clearly we see those onyx stones and those shoulder pieces with all the names of the people of God on.

He says, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also that shall believe on Me through their word." He draws near to God at the golden altar with the incense, and speaks to God in relation to His glory amongst His people, and His garments of fine linen come out very clearly. He says, "I have glorified Thee on the earth; I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do." How beautiful are the garments the Lord is wearing there, those garments of glory and beauty. One would commend the 17th John to our hearts as illustrating what priestly garments are. On the other hand, how the Lord stands as the Royal Priest in Luke, everywhere bringing out the compassions of God towards man. Then "they sat at His feet and heard His Word." That is Luke. He was there teaching men for God. Dear brethren, it is open to all the saints to take up this service—to draw near to God with



the sacrifices of praise continually—the fruit of our lips—giving thanks to His name, but it can only be done according to God under the blessed influence of the Great High Priest.

It is open to us to draw near to man with the compassions of the heart of God, but it can only be done under the influence of that Royal Priest, that King that is a Priest upon the throne—that Royal Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ—and so He stands at the head of all the Priests as the Great High Priest, having in everything the pre-eminence.

Now just a few more words. There is another service that is open to all the saints, and that is the service of song. What a blessed service that is. That is one of the greatest of all. How shall we sing? Where shall we get the note from? Habbakuk is thinking about that. He has got a song in his heart. He says, “Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail,” and further on he says, “There shall be no herd in the stalls.” Though there is nothing that would make him outwardly happy, he says, “Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.” He has got a song, but he feels that he cannot, he is not adequate, to bring it to the heart of God, and so he says at once, “To the Chief Singer on my stringed instruments.” He hands that song that is in his heart over to the Chief Singer. That is the place of the Lord Jesus—at the head of all singers. All singing that reaches God’s ear reaches Him through the Chief Singer. It is led by Him; it is controlled by Him. It comes up to the ear of God from Him. You look over the headings of the Psalms and you will find that is the bearing of a good many of them.



David writes the Psalm—it is a song—and then hands it over to the Chief Musician—that is, Christ. He takes that song and renders it to the heart of God. Dear brethren, the Lord delights in that service. That is a service that is going on for ever. There are a great many songs to sing. One could not speak of them to-night, but the Lord leads them all. You remember when God laid the foundations of the earth it says, “The morning stars sang together.” They sang creation’s song, celebrating God’s greatness. When the Lord Jesus became man He takes the lead in that song, as He takes what the Creator gives in the loaves and fishes, and He lifts up His eyes and blesses. That is the song of creation. The Lord leads it.

We have all followed what the Lord started then, as the Chief Singer, and so with every song; He leads all the singing that goes up to God’s ear, and He is called the “Sweet Psalmist,” and He is going on with the singing, conducting the service of song until we come to the last two or three Psalms, and what a song it is! The Chief Singer calls upon the heavens to praise God. It says, “Praise Him, ye heavens; praise Him, sun and moon; praise Him, all ye stars of light”; and then He comes down and says “Praise the Lord from the earth, fire and hail, snow and vapor, stormy winds fulfilling His word, mountains and all hills, fruitful trees, kings of the earth and all peoples, princes”; and He goes on leading every part of the universe into song to God until he reaches the end of the 150th Psalm. and the Psalms are finished. He says, “Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord.” This is done under the hand of the Sweet Psalmist of Israel. He is the Chief Singer.

He says, "In the midst of the Church will I sing praises to Thee." If we have part—and we can have part, and we do have part—it is under the influence and direction of the Chief Singer or the Chief Musician.

One delights to think of eternity, and what fills eternity is song. The whole universe, under the hand of Christ, is singing to God responses as they know them, and then it says God joins in it. It says, "He will rest in His love, He will joy over them with singing." What a contrast to what is here. It says in Genesis that God looked down upon the earth and it grieved Him at His heart. Under the blessed hand of the Chief Singer the end is this, that everything is singing. God is singing, and the whole universe, under the hand of Christ, is singing. That is the thing that goes on for ever.

There is one more word I would like to leave, and I cannot say much about it. There is another service—the greatest of all—that is open to every believer, and that is the service of Sonship, which, dear brethren, is infinitely great. "Let My son go that he may serve Me," said God. There is a service connected with Sonship that the Lord Jesus gives us part in, but how one delights to come back to this—that in everything He has the first place, and so He is spoken of "as the firstborn of many brethren." It speaks of "being conformed to the image of His Son" in order that He might be the firstborn of many brethren. The Firstborn of this family is in the lead. He stands at the head, but there are many others. What a word it is: "Many brethren." The brethren of Christ are the sons of God, and they share His part and place and relationship to the Father, but they do so with the Lord Jesus as

the Firstborn. That wonderful service to the heart of God is under the influence and direction of the Son of God.

It is a service that is connected with relationship. "Go tell My brethren that I ascend unto My Father and your Father, to My God and your God." What God will get for ever is the service of sons. What marks sons is that they enjoy relationship with the Father, which implies the enjoyment of Divine affections on the one hand and intelligence as to the mind of God on the other.

The sons of God, in Scripture, always are intelligent and sympathetic in whatever God is doing, and they are able to minister to His heart—they joy in His love. "That the love wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in them, and I in them." That is the love of Sonship. One can only say as to that, that the measure in which we enter into it is the measure in which we are under the direction and influence of the Son of God. The Lord Jesus Christ is the firstborn of many brethren. May the Lord grant to us all that we might be able to touch these wonderful, Divine, eternal realities, as having our hearts more and more brought into attachment to Christ.

The secret of Christianity is that Christ has His place in our hearts, and that He is waxing greater and greater. That keeps us, and that alone fits us to take up the service of God in any way whatever.

W. J. HOUSE.

Melbourne, 21/4/24.

## BROTHERLY RELATIONS.

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Amos 1: 9.—“For three transgressions of Tyrus, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they delivered up the whole captivity to Edom, and remembered not the brotherly covenant.”

7.—“For three transgressions of Edom, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because he did pursue his brother with the sword, and did cast off all pity, and his anger did tear perpetually, and he kept his wrath for ever.”

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While, undoubtedly, there are numerous elements which contribute to the fostering of conditions of restfulness among the saints, there is one element which does so in a special degree, and that is the sense we have of being in the Lord's hands. To feel that He is dealing with us with a view to working out His own ends with us, so that we should, more and more, be contributors to His delights—to know with fullest confidence that He has us in hand, and that not a circumstance or detail of all the happenings with His Church are unknown or unmeasured by Him—cannot but give a sense of rest to the heart that loves Him, and to the soul that lives in the assurance of His perfect wisdom. He is thus making all things contribute to the building up of those traits in His people which mark them off as His family, His company.

There is one of these traits that I desire specially to call attention to. Among the many

lessons for the saints which fill out their earthly pilgrimage not the least instructive and educative is that one which arises in connection with the efforts of Satan to break brotherly relations among the people of God. It is the principle of Tyre coming in which breaks the brotherly covenant, and that of Edom which draws the sword against his brother. In view of these two conditions arising among the saints, our exercises may well be awakened.

One of the special and most precious activities of the Holy Spirit of God is that work which draws the people of God into such consolidating and unifying conditions and relations with each other that they unconsciously move and think together, and affections are so developed and interdependent that no room is found for distrust and distance. It is in such a blessed atmosphere, as established by Him among the saints, that confidence in mutual fulness exists. This confidence, a gracious growth of divine planting, yields its pure fragrance impartially and intangibly, and yet exerts such an influence that no disturbance can intrude. The soil from whence it springs is love, the love of God, that love which is shed abroad by the Holy Spirit, who wraps about the hearts and spirits of the saints, as it were, a divine mantle that excludes the touch of doubt, distrust and discord upon them. In such a circle where all this prevails Christ Jesus the Lord is known, and He knows, none better, all the sweetness and simplicity of it, for He is its inspiration and its fount. One dwells with delight upon the life of such a circle as one comes spiritually into the feelings proper to it, and thus learns that here is what is living, perfect and abiding.

But the existence of such a circle of bliss and mutual fellowship cannot but be the special object of attack upon the part of Satan, and he will surely busy himself to introduce into it what must break it up, if it could. In the hope of, in some measure, establishing and illustrating this fact, one turns with interest to Amos 1: 9-12. Let us first remind ourselves of Hiram's entering into relations, first with David, and then with Solomon. He is brought before us as one who was ever a lover of David, delighting to minister to his glory and pleasure. Then when Solomon came to the throne, his efforts were directed toward the building and embellishing of the temple. Tyre is only twice previously referred to, and then as a place of strength, as indeed, its very name denotes. What all this teaches us is that in Hiram we see one who was characterised by devotion to the interests of David personally, and to the setting up of the temple, so that it should be the place of testimony. He seems to have whole-heartedly put the resources of his wonderful city at the disposal of David and Solomon. He and all he governed were subordinated to the interests of God's king and God's city. It was under such conditions that the brotherly covenant came into existence, a covenant of which the primary condition was that Tyre was to be contributory to the greatness, interests and influence of David and the temple and the people of God. All must go to enhance the pleasure of a system other than Tyre or its authority. Alas, there came a situation and a time when, in place of the interests of David and the temple being paramount and exclusive, other purposes and other ends prevailed. We see the climax of this in the alliance of Ahab with Jezebel, daughter of

Ethbaal, king of the Zidonians, Zidon being the confederate city of Tyre. Thus the consummation of the rupture of the brotherly covenant was reached.

But we need not pursue this train of teaching further, as my main thought is to emphasise that whole-hearted devotedness to the interests and glory of Christ is a solid basis for ensurance of the brotherly covenant, keeping the people of God in the mutual exercise of contributing in every way to the ends that God has in view for us. The simple-hearted pursuit of this must build up confidence among the saints, and remove occasions for all misunderstandings. Should a breach come into the fellowship thus established, it can only be that some other interest has intruded, and diverted the mind and estranged the heart from Christ and the interests of the house as the temple of God. Such is, in principle, the spirit of things set forth by Tyre. Tyre is a strong city, we are told. Its strength, as subordinated to the interests of Christ and the building of the temple, is rightly placed, and that can only be as the brotherly covenant governs the heart. But when Christ is displaced and His interests lost sight of, then its strength is wholly diverted to the subverting of the truth of God and the denial of His Christ. This can only bring down the terrible doom pronounced upon the prince of Tyrus in Ezekiel, while in our Scripture we see the principle concisely stated.

We seem thus to be faced with the very searching exercise, for us all collectively as for us each individually, as to where we are as to the interests of Christ and the building of the temple. Are these the governing factors



of our lives, and do they constitute the spring of all our relations with each other, so that the brotherly covenant is maintained intact in all its pristine freshness, power and vitality?

Another serious element in the destruction of fellowship and confidence is the pursuing our brother with the sword. This is specifically stated as being that which brings about the judgment of Edom. We might remark, in passing, that both Gaza and Tyre are impugned for the deliverance of the captivity to the vengeance of Edom. Whatever leaves room for the activity of Edom in destroying that which is the object of God's care, dealing or solicitude, must come under the judgment of God. The spirit of Philistinism hands over what is precious to God to the destroying influence and power of Edom, as also does the spirit of Tyre; that is, the interests of God and His temple have ceased to govern the heart and direct the mind, and human interests and the desire for one's own power and influence get the upper hand. But what are we to say about that awful spirit of Edom which comes in seeking to bring about the ruin and displacement of one's brother? To forget at any time that any one of the saints of God is my brother, whatever may be his ways or whatever happens, indicates how Edom has been revived in my spirit. When God is dealing with breakdown and failure among His people, and there is governmental action on His part, for any saint to come in, upon whatever plea it may be, and availing himself of that action by God, to raise the sword against his brother, is the very spirit of Edom in the soul. It may be on the plea of righteousness, or the brother may be in the wrong. God does not

overlook this. One has only to think of the attitude of the Lord to Peter in taking the sword. There was wrongdoing there, the Lord Himself was the object of attack—yet the whole act was out of place, and sprang from the spirit of Edom. So also when James and John would bring down fire from heaven upon the Samaritan village.

The meaning of the action of Edom is that he is not seeking what is living, or to preserve life, but ever brings in death. Edom's activity must ever result in destruction of one sort or another. To act, even if conscious of being an instrument of God, in the way of destroying our brother, with an utter disregard of the situation existant and the effects of our action, must mean that we also have not watched our spirits, and have thus slipped into what is Edom in principle. In so doing, we make a grave mistake, for the people of God are here to preserve, to recover, to deliver, to bring in life. The Lord had to tell James and John that they knew not what spirit they were of. Has He to say that to us? To lose sight of this is to manifest a state and spirit that must bring in the judgment of God, whether with the individual or the company. To destroy life is not of Christ, the Prince of Life. It is a departure from Christianity.

One has observed saints acting with sword in hand and then being surprised at the absence of brotherly spirit, insensible to the real character of their actions—how it is they who have destroyed brotherliness. What a humbling discovery it is for any one of us, when we get our eyes opened to the truth of the situation. Edom must betray himself, for he ever seeks to destroy—never to build up or preserve. His

cry must ever be "Overthrow, overthrow, overthrow."

It is not that there has not been breakdown, betrayal, evil and so forth, but we need to examine ourselves, lest in handling, or having to do with it, we betray Edom at work with us, and so destroy the sense of brotherhood, both in ourselves and in our brother. It is in such ways confidence is lost among us. We need, then, a holier spirit of self-examination. Let us pay a visit to that secret chamber of our heart, so long locked and perhaps forgotten, and opening its door, expose the existence there of what we have supposed ourselves to be innocent—unrecognised, and therefore unjudged. Let us humbly bring it forth to the Cross of Christ, and in self-judgment deal with it.

Thus only can we be preserved from pursuing a course akin to that referred to. It is easy to persuade ourselves we are doing God's work, and resisting evil and standing for the truth. So was Peter when he drew the sword. Yet we are overlooking all the time that there is that working in our own hearts, and among ourselves, that is destructive of confidence and brother relations. The essence of the brotherly covenant is our being set for the interests of Christ, and the building up of the testimony in the hearts of God's people, as the temple of God; and what will enable us to avoid taking the sword in hand is that we should be in the truth as it is in Jesus, and seek what is living and foster it.

G. A. VAN SOMEREN.



## NEARNESS AND CONFIDENCE.

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It is of all moment that we should first clearly understand the things which are distinctively characteristic of Christianity, and then see how they affect us in our pathway through the world. It is in this pathway that the faith of saints is practically tested. Many of us would like to find some unvarying rule by which, in the midst of church difficulties, to steer our way; while, as to circumstances, we should be well pleased to see, as another has said, a full supply for every need within our reach. Neither the one nor the other is at all likely to be the experience of saints if going on with God, since there would in either case be but little call for the exercise of faith, or of moral perception. The question then arises, are we to be dismayed by the anticipation of troubles in the assembly, or of pressure in our individual path? or what is the antidote? The answer is confidence—and confidence is the effect of nearness, having its source in the knowledge of God: "I know whom I have believed." Nearness may be spoken of as the peculiar characteristic blessing of Christianity. Now that redemption has been accomplished, and Christ is exalted, as man, to God's right hand, God has begun to effectuate the purposes of His will, and in this the heavenly takes precedence of the earthly.

The two great parts of God's will are constantly before us in the Hebrews, in the distinction between the sanctuary and the coven-

ant. As being for the moment God's people on the earth, Christians come incidentally into the blessings of the new covenant; but the calling is as priests to serve a living God in the sanctuary. Every part of the New Testament coincides in shewing nearness to be the peculiar portion of Christians. The beginning of the Gospel of Luke is that God has approached man where he is, in such wise as that the pious Simeon could take the infant Saviour in his arms. The Son of God had come down into man's place and circumstances. The end is that the risen Lord takes the repentant thief to be with Him in His place. He first visits man here in grace, and then, in virtue of His work, takes man to be a resident with Him in Paradise.

In John we find not only the manifestation on earth of the eternal life which was with the Father, but also the work of the Father who was seeking worshippers in spirit and in truth, and was drawing to the Son, that the Son might introduce those drawn to Him into the blessing and privilege of eternal life; and this not deferred, but present, though the communion of His death was essential to it. He that ate His flesh and drank His blood had eternal life. As He lived because of the Father, so he that ate Him would live because of Him. The place suitable to this was the Father's house, to which He would bring His own; but meantime the Comforter would come, and in that day they would know that Jesus was in the Father, and they in Him, and He in them.

When we come to Paul we find more definitely the new place for man in Christ, and the truth of new creation. The expression "made nigh in Christ Jesus," in Ephesians 2: 13, may mean dispensationally, in contrast with the

previous place of Gentiles; but the climax of the teaching is that God has made Jew and Gentile to sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the coming ages He may display in them the exceeding riches of His grace. But already we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of Jesus.

Now no expression is more remarkable than this—to have boldness with God, and liberty with confidence. It is a condition of things which could exist only where the Spirit is, and certainly conveys the idea that we have to do with a God who has pleasure in being approached, and who sets Himself to encourage those who have the privilege of approaching.

In the Hebrews we are on somewhat different ground, and it is important to remember that no shadow in the law contained the very image of Christian privilege. There we find that though believers have, as being incidentally a people of God on earth, a throne of grace, the calling is that they are sons, whom Christ is not ashamed to call brethren; and that, as a priestly company, they already have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, to serve the living God. We not only receive, as Israel will, the effect of Christ's death in forgiveness here, but we must go through that death into the marvellous light of God's presence, into which flesh has no entrance.

Now here are privileges which properly belong to heaven, and to those who have the Spirit of God's Son. They are the proper inalienable portion of saints now; and our life down here being, as it were, an incident in the ways of God, is subordinate to our heavenly privileges. We miss the mark if we attempt



to reverse the order. More than this, it may be doubted if any saint who has tasted the blessing of nearness, and the peculiar delight of boldness with God, would care to attach much importance to life and circumstances here, save as they give him opportunity of doing God's will in patience, and having part in the ministry of grace. And the touchstone of things now is not how they compromise our character in the eyes of men, but how they affect and hinder our sense of boldness and liberty with God.

Now where we fail to walk in the enjoyment of our privileges, the spirit of distrust soon finds place in the heart. On the other hand, there is warmth in nearness, which nourishes confidence, and if we ask anything according to His will, we know that He heareth us. It is thus that we are enabled to go fearlessly through the world.

In the presence of difficulties in the assembly, saints are often puzzled and overwhelmed by a cloud of writing and talk; what we need is to be so in the enjoyment of liberty with God that we maintain confidence; the result is that we instinctively gain a sense of what is according to God, and a moral judgment often of spirits as well as of words. The Lord had, as one may say, His intuitions from above (John 5: 30), and we have to try the spirits whether they are of God, because everything is not now to be trusted. The same spirit of confidence applies to difficulties in the individual path of saints. The secret of ability to endure is confidence in a living God, Who is the Saviour of all men, and especially of them that believe—a confidence that leaves all with God, in the sense that from the outset He has



laid out all our pathway down here, having in view an end that is worthy of His goodness. There is no other secret of health and comfort in the soul of the saint, and it is in the liberty of nearness to God that this secret is learned.

May the Lord awaken saints to the sense of their privileges, that the Father's house may be the fitting climax to their experience here.

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