

DIVINE WORKMANSHIP AMIDST RUIN

AND OTHER ADDRESSES

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DIVINE WORKMANSHIP AMIDST RUIN

II Kings xxv. 27-30; Proverbs x. 1; Psalms cxix. 174;
Ecclesiastes i. 4-6 and xi. 4-6; Song of Solomon v. 9-10.

HISTORICALLY everything connected with man's responsibility ends in shame. Everything that God has set up in responsibility on earth, has ended in ruin. He set man up in a garden, under commandment, and he fell. He chose a nation and cultivated it for many generations; it also failed, and when He sent His Son, they crucified Him. He set up the church in a public position as a light-bearer; it too has failed, and indeed is the greatest failure of all. If our own histories were examined there would be found chapters of failure which would make us hang our heads in shame for many of us are, or have been, public failures. All that I have said is patent, self-evident, hardly needing to be said; but I draw attention to it in order to provide a background for the subject before me. I desire to speak of divine workmanship in the midst of man's ruin and failure.

II Kings xxv. records the end of the original history of Israel : there is further historical matter in Ezra and Nehemiah, but that is their history as recovered. The Book of Kings gives the end of the original history, and thus gives the key to the present public position of the people of God. We find there that the imprisoned King of Judah is lifted out of prison, his prison garments are changed, and he is given a daily allowance. This illustrates the public position to-day. We, as the people of God, may be tolerated in the world, but the things of God have been captured publicly, by the world-system.

The things of God have been made to appear very small, the people are few in number, and the world is not at all concerned about the spreading of the truth. There is no quaking at the headquarters of evil, no fear that the truth will overthrow the world-system. Publicly, the things of God have been captured, and the world is at the moment tolerating what is thus humiliated, obscure, and weak. That is how history would leave the matter, with christianity as a thoroughly discredited failure.

Let us now speak of what has come out of the history. It is a great encourage-

ment to one's soul to observe that God *has* secured something, for though apparently defeated in provisional things, He is triumphant in eternal things. God can afford to see provisional things destroyed by an enemy, if through the destruction He can form moral qualities in His saints, which will abide when every provisional thing has passed away. As apprehending this we are less concerned by the actual history than by what came out of it for God.

The four books from which we read form a group of books ; which do not deal with matters of history, nor are exactly connected with any dispensation. The bearing they had when written is the same to-day. They represent what comes *out* of the history, and what God has secured during thousands of years of intensive labour. They do not represent what is public or noteworthy in the world. The record of a man shedding tears because he kept not the law of Jehovah would be reckoned unworthy of the newspapers, but it is a great sight to God.

Now the Psalms bring in the idea of experience with God. We should not attach much weight to a believer who has had no experience with God. With such

an one things are superficial, easily acquired, easily given up ; but with a soul that has had to do with God there is depth, gravity, and dignity, features which can be observed by those having eyes to see.

For soul experience the book of Psalms is a mine of wealth. It covers every circumstance of life—conflict, scorn, humiliation, soul-distress, suffering, repentance, anxiety, fear and trembling—in short, all life's experiences that would cast us upon God for deliverance and mercy. The life line of the whole book is the law of Jehovah. It is shewn in Psalm i. and concludes in Psalm cxix., which is properly the end of the book. That Psalm gives the climax reached through prayer and suffering, passed through with God, and which results in an intense love for Jehovah's law as the moral standard of life.

What choice expressions of soul appreciation we get ! “ Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee ” ; “ Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law ” ; “ Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity ; quicken thou me in thy way ” ; and “ I will speak of thy testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed ” ; “ Mine eyes fail for thy word, saying, When

wilt thou comfort me ? ” “ O, how love I thy law ! it is my meditation all the day ” ; “ How sweet are thy words unto my taste, yea sweeter than honey to my mouth ” ; “ Rivers of waters run down mine eyes because they keep not thy law. ” All these expressions set forth an intense appreciation of the moral law which is suited to those in relationship with God ; everything is measured by the divine standard. The presence of God is known and sensibilities suited to God have been formed. Such sensibilities would carry little if any value in the world, but without them God’s presence cannot be known, and the truth would be held only in form. So I think we see that the Psalms have to do with what is moral, not exactly with what is spiritual. They show that all the experiences of life, if gone through with God, would result in moral formation, and an intense love for the things God loves. In that way we should become like Him who loved righteousness and hated lawlessness, and there would be that formed in us to which God can appeal. We cannot become spiritual apart from these moral foundations, because spirituality cannot characterise us when the flesh and its workings

are not discerned and hated. As born in a sinful condition, into a sinful world, we need to learn how good and evil are to be disentangled, so that by the work of God in us we may love what is morally choice.

Passing now to the book of Proverbs, I suggest that we touch the region of spiritual things. It shows how a son is educated in what is proper and comely to sonship, so that there may be features of wisdom. "A wise son maketh a glad father ; but a foolish son is the grief of his mother." Sonship is a spiritual thought. It is not the moral line developed through human experience, but is connected with the purpose of God. It is outside of, and even prior to, the raising of moral questions, but nevertheless in the scene where moral questions are raised, God educates His sons. His thought for His people is that they should not only be sons by faith, but in affection, intelligence and wisdom. Only thus can God have His portion in them. I should turn to the New Testament for the doctrine of sonship, but I should turn to Proverbs for the education of it. The beginnings of this education are in youth, when we come under the teaching and influence of a father and a

mother, suggesting, perhaps, the objective and subjective sides of the truth. We learn that wisdom connected with sonship was before the earth was. It has cognisance of every divine movement from eternity (chap. viii). That which was in eternity is now in house conditions—(chap. ix.)—and the simple are invited to turn in. We learn how to behave as away from protective influences, to use just balances, to walk amidst deceit, in the dignity of sons trained in the divine school. Then in chapter xxv. we learn how to behave as sons in the company of the brethren as amidst all the exercises of recovery, where all the hidden things are to be searched out; things which it is God's glory to conceal, but the glory of kings to search out. We learn what conduct will preserve sonship amongst the brethren, and so we find ourselves in the path of obscure but wise things upon the earth; and thus we reach the wise woman—the church—not in its public position, where failure has come in and which is despised, but the church as she will be when displayed as a trustworthy vessel, the features of which are now being formed in a day of public failure. These are spiritual thoughts, and if I could put more

emphasis on this than on any other feature, I should be content ; for the great goal of divine grace is to make us spiritual persons, able to exult in the precious, eternal thoughts of God.

The next book, Ecclesiastes, is one that properly flows out of the two to which I have already referred. I want to dwell upon it because it is the preacher's book. Every preacher should study this book. If he has not learned its teaching he cannot preach with intelligence according to the divine intent in preaching. He may speak to men and bring a good deal of relief and comfort into their lives ; or he may give them a sense of eternal security, but he cannot be a preacher according to the bearing of this book, unless his preaching is with a view to forming assemblies, for that is the meaning of the word—Preacher—" a former of assemblies." The great joy of the work of an evangelist is not that souls are saved from perishing eternally, but that material is secured for the assembly. The joy of the work of a teacher is to see that material fitted into the assembly. So we find the Preacher sought out acceptable words, words of truth.

One feels how essential it is, in speaking of the things of God, to use acceptable words. It is not a matter of using words that set forth the speaker's eloquence ; the words are to be chosen and acceptable. He himself is regarded as the one who chooses them, and the great point to note is that the words are to be related to the work of God. These two themes run through this book : what a man preaches, and what God does. What God does is like the bones growing in the womb of her that is with child. That is the work of God ; unknown and unseen, but side by side with the work of God men are preaching ; and the marvel of divine wisdom is that the words of weak, failing men are to be related to the work of God. It is not the preacher who effects the work ; God does His own work ; but in grace, He who knows and sees, connects the two together and the product is a son.

The result of the teaching of the three books is that sons are set in assemblies. The preacher is not to observe the clouds or the wind in the morning and evening. In sowing seed he does not know which shall prosper, whether this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good, but his work is to go on. He may see nothing,

hear nothing, but God secures a son. The preacher has to move amidst things that vex his soul, and he does not reach the point of thinking that he has done anything or secured anything. He has found a man amongst a thousand, but a woman has he not found. Thus he labours under the sense that he is accomplishing nothing. There was much vexation yet he "still taught the people knowledge." He learns that much that is under the sun, the sphere of education, is as dead flies which cause the ointment of the apothecary to stink and ferment; in other words, that certain things discredit the ministry. He learns also "if the iron be blunt, and one do not whet the edge, then must he apply more strength." How often the edge of the word is blunt and perhaps we endeavour to put more energy and rhetoric into it to make up for the lack of power.

Before leaving this book, I might point out that in chap. i. the spheres of service are indicated: "One generation passeth away and another generation cometh, but the earth standeth for ever." The Lord educates His people in generations, thus promoting the exercise of handing things over. Paul exhorted Timothy to commit things to faithful men, who in turn should

teach others. The earth abides until the ways of God are completed. The first earth is educational. All the Lord's people will have lived on it, and in this way will have come under the teaching connected with the sun. "The sun also riseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to its place where it ariseth,"—here is suggested the blessed path of our Lord Jesus, His coming into manhood, His death, His resurrection and ascension. Just as the sun's movements regulate and control all life, so the import of the great movements of Christ are brought to bear on all His people. They are morally formed and controlled by the position He has taken. The same truth is brought to bear on every generation of saints; all were formed under the precious influence of His death and resurrection. Nothing else, nothing of man, has had any part in their formation, so in heaven they will bear the same image. Then the activities of the Spirit are suggested: "The wind goeth towards the south, and turneth about towards the north: it turneth about continually, and the wind returneth again to its circuits." The activities of the Holy Spirit have been the same towards every generation of saints, it is the same

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circuit. First the south, the favourable presentation of Christ that meets all need ; then the north, as seen in the Psalms, the deepening, through tribulation, of the moral work in us. The Lord would not allow any of us to pass through life, the only period of education that we shall have, without making things real to us. He loves us too well for that. He takes care that we pass through the bitter as through the sweet ; through the north as through the south. Are the things of Christ real to us as we sit before the Lord ? If they are not living and real and precious, seek His face about it. In this way the work of God and the words of the preacher are interwoven, and Christ is the subject of the preaching. On any other line our words would only be as beating the air. The great purpose of the preaching is, that we come under Christ as the Former of Assemblies. We shall thus find the associations in which sonship can be known.

I pass on to the Song of Solomon, the last of the group of books which suggest what comes out of the history of shame and failure. The " Song " is presented as most choice. It is one of the thousand that Solomon wrote, and the only one that

is preserved for us. In this we get the suggestion that it is exceeding choice. Had there been two we should have had a comparison, but as it stands we carry the impression of an only one, that is its beauty and distinction. It shews how Christ is to stand in the eyes of all His people, as they pass the way I have indicated. It is not His distinction doctrinally, or positionally, but what He is in moral worth and beauty, in the affections of the church. John's gospel speaks of Him as "an only begotten with a father," that is what He was in manhood to God. Now to the church He is a beloved, unlike any other beloved, and every feature of His beauty is known. Where were they discerned? In scenes of lawlessness while we were going through life's history, we learnt that His head was as the finest gold; in scenes of unrest, we learnt that His eyes were like doves by the water-brooks; in scenes of suffering we learnt that His lips were as lillies dropping liquid myrrh; in scenes where many beloveds have held the affections of men, we learnt Him as a beloved unlike any other, altogether lovely, chiefest amongst ten thousand. This is the feature of the heavenly company; an intense appre-

ciation of Christ and no appreciation of anything else. What a magnificent result ! How like God to work amidst the ruins ! What credit and glory His work will bring to Him, that, with such persons as we are, and in such circumstances and influences as surround us, He has worked, in obscurity, in patience, but in the exceeding greatness of His power, to secure that which will be to His eternal glory !

Someone has spoken about the span of a man's life, that in the days of Adam it was well-nigh a thousand years, but is now reduced to threescore years and ten. A thousand years gives the idea of enjoyment, thus a man *lived* to enjoy. But threescore years and ten is too short for enjoyment, it is for formation and education ; the time for enjoyment remains —“ a rest unto the people of God.” We only *taste* the joy now. Threescore and ten years is sufficient for education and to learn to love the things Christ loved ; to learn the grace of sonship, so that we shall be suitable companions for Him. The trouble is, people will regard the present life as for enjoyment, and labour to get the most out of it. But if things in life are taken up in relation to education, and God is allowed to have His way, He

can make it yield bountifully. It is a blessed moment in our histories when we cease our struggles and yield in holy submission to the activities of divine grace.



FOUR PILLARS

Acts ix. 20-28 and x. 9-15; I Peter ii. 3-5; I John ii. 12-13;
Ephesians i. 22-23 and ii. 22.

IN reading the New Testament, one notices that there are four conspicuous persons; conspicuous because they were privileged to see the Lord—either on the holy mount or in the third heaven—apart from the conditions of humiliation in which He appeared to other men; and around the ministry of these men the structure of the New Testament is built. All scripture has a structure, a design; it is not a compilation of words thrown together. There is not a feature that you could call accidental in all the word of God. Everything is spoken by design, and things are left out by design. One writer contributes to another, so that a spiritual person—one educated in the ways of God—can so put the scriptures together that the great intent of all scripture may become manifest. The divine design behind all scripture is that God would make Christ great. God has not only set Him in a position of greatness, but His thought is to give a right impression and appre-

ciation of that greatness to all who love Him.

Peter, James, John and Paul are the four conspicuous men to whom I refer as being pillars. The first three are seen with the Lord on the holy mount, and in the garden of Gethsemene. They are thus in a special position of great privilege and intimacy which was not shared by the others. Paul was caught up to the third heaven and heard unspeakable things.

I speak first about James, because he represents the great element of sacrifice. He was martyred. He does not take any active part in ministry with the others, but he disappeared in suffering. The history of James would give us the impression that the precious things of God cannot be secured apart from sacrifice ; it is this which makes things real. Christianity brings in spiritual wealth, but it makes demands which can only be met by sacrifice. The fact that James is martyred does not bring things to an end, they are to go on ; the element of sacrifice balancing the features of light and privilege. We do well to consider this thought, for it is important to accept it.

Concerning Peter, John and Paul, we are not told in scripture of the actual

death of any one of them. We know that the Lord had told Peter that he was to glorify God by his death ; we know that Paul was near to the end of his course ; but actually the divine historical record leaves them still alive—Peter warning the saints, and Paul a prisoner of Rome. There he dwelt in his hired lodging, receiving all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching the things of Jesus Christ, with all freedom unhinderedly (Acts xxviii. 31). That is how Paul is left ; no longer going out to men, that is, he had receded from the public eye, but there were those who were coming to him. Then John is left on the isle of Patmos, for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. That is how the scriptural history leaves these men, and that is how we are to think of them. We are to regard them as living persons in those circumstances, and their ministry is to have a bearing on our souls in accord with that.

We all know that the ministry of the kingdom was committed to Peter. The Lord Himself went away to heaven, and He entrusted the keys of the kingdom to Peter. He had confidence in him. In the ministry of Peter you will find king-

dom thoughts. He brings in what is preparatory ; what has an application to the saints as living in a world of evil ; as having the flesh within them, and as surrounded by enemies. The intent of Peter's ministry is to prepare the saints for Paul, as the scriptures before us will show.

To Paul was committed the unfolding of the mystery. He received his commission from a glorified Christ. He came in late, as one who had never seen Christ after the flesh ; as one whose links with Him were only in resurrection. The other apostles, who had been with Jesus here, had links which were broken in death, connected with the life the Lord laid down ; but Paul received his commission from Christ in heaven. There is divine teaching in that, for the great bulk of the persons who form the assembly have never known Christ after the flesh ; Paul is representative of that company whose only link with Christ is connected with the glory. Having received his commission from the glory, the mystery hidden throughout the ages in God is given to him to unfold.

Now to John, the brother of James the martyr, was given the ministry connected with the family of God. He

brings in the idea of family links, and speaks in family terms. Furthermore, John is the last of the New Testament writers, and his ministry is to have distinctive force to the end: "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" (John xx. 22). In other words, John was given a living ministry for the last days; days in which both Peter and Paul would be publicly set aside. Both Peter and Paul are left as captives of the world system; Peter just about to be carried out, and Paul about to be poured out; that is, both are about to die, and the teaching of Peter and Paul is utterly discredited. Its existence is acknowledged, but it is not recognised as controlling the situation. You could not have the religious systems around unless Peter and Paul, especially Paul, had been pushed into the background and discredited. How could you recognise Paul as authoritative, and allow clericalism? Paul would say "We have all been baptised into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free"; and again "The eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee." If you bring Paul to the front, clericalism and many other things welcomed in

christendom would have to go. So in order to make these man-made systems workable, both Peter and Paul are pushed into the background, and the public position is they are just about to die. Look into the religious mind to-day, and you will find they are just on the point of putting Paul out altogether. That is how the matter stands publicly to-day, and the present position in the religious world confirms the prophetic scripture.

But John is not in prison and not a captive. He is on a lonely island. No crowd of inquirers surrounds him and if you would find him, you must go to him ; but if you do you will find a living ministry, given by the Lord for a day in which Peter and Paul are discredited. You will find too that John is getting visions and revelations, showing how the Lord is going to deal with the great false system of profession—with Babylon the harlot ; and with every other power that has exalted itself against God. Thus we see how these men are left in scripture, and how their final position is a prophetic indication of the way their teaching would be regarded in our day.

Turning now to the import of their ministry, as it bears upon us, I would

show from the way things are introduced in the Acts that Peter's work is first with the Jew. Between the testimony to the Jew, and the opening of the door to the Gentiles, Paul is introduced. This new movement on the Lord's part is reached in chapter ix., and the new vessel is brought in. The Lord always has something in reserve. It is dangerous to think otherwise. He has power to make movements that brethren have never anticipated or thought of. He has the power to bring in persons, and with those persons, new things and features. The Lord always holds that power. We are in a poor state if we think that we know all the Lord is going to do, and may even rebel against His movements. Our proper attitude is to be always expectant, that out of His great power and the vast resources of His hand the Lord would bring in what is fresh and new. These movements are evidences that the Lord is alive, that He loves His people, and that though unseen and in heaven, He directs everything connected with His saints. Here, then, the Lord makes a new movement. He brings in another vessel. No one had thought there was a vessel in reserve. The twelve, the apostles, were complete.

One had been chosen by the Spirit to fill the place of Judas, and the Lord had gone to the right hand of God, but what comes out is that from heaven the Lord is going to bring in a glorious addition in Paul, the chosen vessel, one set apart, as he says, from his mother's womb. The Lord has His eye upon him. He allowed him to go his own way, hostile to what God was building up, but when the moment came, He called, and Saul of Tarsus bowed before the power of Him who quickeneth whom He will. It is of interest to see that Peter is not allowed to open the door of the kingdom to the Gentiles until Paul, this new vessel, is brought to light and the brethren have *received* him. When the disciples show that they are prepared to treasure his life, letting him over the wall in a basket, and giving him liberty to move in and out amongst them, the Lord uses Peter to open the door to the Gentiles. There is much instruction in this, because the kingdom of God does not of itself reach the divine goal. Even to-day we may preach the gospel and in that way give men the light of the kingdom. They may be relieved and protected from enemies, but if they are not consciously brought into the assembly, they do not

reach God's present goal. Forgiveness is a preparation for being near to God. Eternal security is an outflowing of a far greater thought, and that is to live in the love of God. The safest place in the universe is the love of God. The divine intent is that all who come under the protection of the kingdom should reach the assembly, and learn what their place is there. So that Peter is not liberated for his great work, the work committed to him, until Paul, the one through whom the Lord was going to bring in the light of the mystery, had been received by the brethren. Here then is the position: Paul is welcomed and recognised as a vessel chosen of the Lord. Thus the way is open, and the brethren are ready for the next movement. Now Peter opens the door through which most of those who form the assembly are to pass, for the Gentiles, not the Jews, are going to fill the kingdom in its present aspect. The Jews were brought in at the beginning, but in the subsequent history the work of God was to be amongst the Gentiles.

Well, Peter is now again in the centre of the Lord's ways, but he has to be prepared for the great development which was about to definitely set aside the Jew,

and portray the sovereign movements of God. He is prepared by a vision, and the vision gives the import of his ministry in opening the door to the Gentile. I do not dwell on the detail, but just on the form of the vessel let down from heaven. It bears the similitude of a sheet. It is a vessel, that is the point; but at present it is as it were a sheet. It is reserved for Paul to give us the form and outline of the vessel, but so far as Peter carries us, it is a sheet. Now a sheet is a shapeless sort of thing, but has great capacity for holding things together. It has no symmetry, no form, nor beauty; no idea of design, but it has very great capacity to keep things together. In this sheet are all manner of creeping things, beasts of the field and fowl of the air. There are no fishes in it, but only what is connected with the earth and the air. In these two spheres the way had been opened for Satan to operate by the fall of man. Adam never took up headship over the sea, therefore this sphere was not opened to the power of evil and hence the great resources of God are connected with the sea.

So the kingdom, according to the vision, has first gathered persons in one great

mass, and having features brought about by the ways of sin. Externally they appear unclean, as creeping things and reptiles, showing to what depths man has descended, and that though the persons represented are in the great sheet, they still bear that same external appearance. But God had cleansed them, and they are no longer unclean. However, there are features of self-will, pride and insubjection seen there, and as yet they are only in a mass. God does not leave matters in this condition. He will have myriads to praise Him, but every individual will be an example of the perfect work of God. Now as in such a condition they are given over to Peter, to the subduing power of the kingdom of God, and when Peter, so to speak, hands them over to Paul, they have lost the indistinguishable features of an unsubdued mass, and each has taken on the appearance of a living stone. A stone is a bit of constructional material that is shaped in view of a building. Looking at the stone itself you do not know what place it is to fill, but as having the features of flesh set aside and as having the features of life, the stone can be placed in any part of the structure that the builder desires.

These living stones are persons who have come under the power of the kingdom, their wills have been subdued, the flesh has been judged in the light of the death of Christ, and as having moral features formed by the sway of grace in their souls, they can be placed alongside other persons, other living stones, without fear of conflict. That is how the kingdom would work in us, in view of coming under Paul's teaching with a view to our taking up assembly relation with the Lord, and with one another.

Paul now comes before us as a wise master-builder. Indeed he is an architect, knowing just how those stones are to be fitted together to form that marvellous structure, the house of God—the place where He would dwell. Not that Paul built the house, Christ built it, and the Spirit came down at Pentecost so that God might dwell; but Paul's teaching is to make the saints intelligent as to what has been effected by divine Persons. The house is to be an expression of the things God loves. Even in a man's house you can see what the man is like. He will surround himself with what is congenial, with what expresses himself. So God has marvellous thoughts of the building in

which He would dwell! Every part of it, both in design and structure, must be a delight to God; it must be congenial to Him, it must raise no moral questions; thus every feature is to speak of Christ. God, being what He is, could not dwell in any other surroundings; and one feature of Paul's ministry is that the features of Christ formed by the Holy Spirit should be intelligently discerned, so that when put together it would present no feature which would cause divine unrest.

I now refer to another feature of Paul's ministry, which comes before us in Ephesians i. There we find the assembly referred to as "his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all," so that two definite features of Paul's ministry are before our minds: one, of the assembly as a habitation of God by the Spirit; the other, what the assembly is to Christ as His body.

When the Lord was here on earth the body in which men saw Him was not meant to display what was in Him. The features of His glory were in obscurity. He took a body in which to accomplish the will of God; but it is God's thought that He should be displayed, and the assembly is the chosen vessel as His body

to display the fulness of Him who fills all things. He indeed fills all things, but the assembly is His fulness. Every feature of Christ in its fulness is to be displayed in a living vessel, His body. The Spirit of God would give us in the words of Ephesians i. the sense of the incomparable greatness of Christ. Amongst principalities, authorities, powers, dominions, and every name that is named, He is pre-eminent ; all are under His feet. What distinction ! But it is as Head of the assembly, which is His body, the fulness of Him who filleth all in all, that He shines in the greatest pre-eminence of all. It is His chief distinction in that glorious display !

I turn now to John. He brings in the family side. He is the last writer in the scriptures, and his writings are in view of the day when all that Paul set up in testimony on earth has broken down. John brings in what is vital. This remark does not discredit what God set up at the beginning ; but great as that was, its failure does not impair God's eternal thoughts. It is essential in these days of brokenness and departure to have what is vital. It is good to have the light of the public order of the assembly, as it is developed in I Corinthians ; it is essential

that though in brokenness, we should observe it as by divine commandment ; but if we have not got what is vital, and have only a correct outward form, we shall decay. Meetings cannot be sustained on truths handed on from one generation to another, unless they are held in the vitality of life. A meeting cannot be carried on by cold formalities. If it is to provide opportunities for the interchange of spiritual thoughts, and an outlet for the spiritual emotions of the saints, it must be a living system. John brings in a living system ; not in a public setting, but as the incorruptible work of God, in the energy of a life that is eternal in character. Hence it cannot be destroyed by any enemy operating only in time. This life centres in divine Persons. It is supported in divine Persons. The system of living, unchanging things is not supported by man in responsibility. God is everything—the giver, the seeker, the worker. That is what John presents, and it is presented that disciples might believe.

To be a believer according to John you must be in the light of the glory. The movements of divine Persons are not here to show the compassions of God, but the love of God, and the glory of the One who

came to make God known. This is very vital teaching, and if entered into would make the meetings pulsate with life, and all who come in contact with the saints would gather an impression that life is there : a life that is not supported by the world's system, but by what is beyond death. How important it is that we should apprehend that we stand in family relationship to God, and to one another ; that the saints bear family features ; whether they live in India or Scotland ; that they take character from God and they love one another. There are fathers, young men and children, various stages of growth, but all in a family setting. They are drawn from every circumstance of life here ; they have all borne the image of the earthy ; but God has wrought in them what is new, and of Himself, and has set them together in family links. There is community of thought, and like affections, and but one interest in this family. Every one loves to see the children grow up, delights in the strength of a young man, and honours the experience of a father.

I trust I have conveyed a suggestion as to how these great ministries work together to support us in the last days.

We all need support to-day, but if the precious features of truth connected with the work of Peter, John and Paul are known to our souls, as having grace to walk together in self-judgment, we shall find that God has triumphed, even in these last days. We shall find Paul's ministry has power and is just as workable as ever ; that it is not a vision of a glorious past, but a present workable system.

I should like to impress the need of studying scripture as a whole. Study subjects, rather than verses, and you will find that thoughts begin to take definite shape in the mind. You have the Holy Spirit, and having the Spirit you can become spiritual. It is not a question of the mind or of worldly education ; any one of us can become spiritual, as having the Spirit. All the thoughts of God are open to us. The scriptures will give you comfort, they will confirm you in every circumstance, but they also contain the great thoughts of God—thoughts related to what He does for Himself.



FOUR SPHERES OF EDUCATION

I John iii. 13; I Corinthians xiv. 26, 32-5; Philippians iv. 19;
I Timothy iv. 5.

I THINK I can truthfully say that life, to me, within the last few years, has taken on a very serious aspect. Like many others, I had lightly thought that life was to provide enjoyment. I now perceive that enjoyment cannot be regarded as a main feature of life. Not that I would suggest there is no joy, for there is; but when we come to enjoyment the lack of time or the pressure of circumstances is such that the joy is momentary. Even at a time of fellowship, with the Lord before us, and the joy of the moment upon our spirits, we are conscious that we cannot long support it. It is but for a brief moment that we forget the circumstances and calls connected with human life.

I speak in this way because I wish to emphasise the thought that our life here on earth is a time for education rather than enjoyment. A man of the world

expects and labours to enjoy all with which life can furnish him. He enjoys it to the full, such as it is; and well he might, for it is all he will ever have, but for the believer the quiet enjoyment that is connected with life is in the future. The main purpose for which we are on the earth is that we should be formed by the power of God, and made intelligent by divine teaching to appreciate all that God is as revealed in Christ. In the early days of history God gave man a long spell of life; nearly a thousand years, and I have no hesitation in saying that a shorter period would not suffice for the thought of enjoyment. In the millennial day men will live in human life and circumstances, but in quiet, restful enjoyment of the knowledge of God.

But as we read the word of God and come under the influence of divine teaching, we are turned away from what is earthly. God is teaching us to think little of the greatness of the world's system. He is teaching us to touch the things of human life with a light hand, so that even "they that have wives be as though they had none."

I speak in this way to emphasise that scripture does not support the

thought that the full enjoyment of christian blessing is to be known in *human* life and conditions on earth, for death rests upon them. But joy for us lies in the sphere of resurrection where Christ is, in which we touch unchangeable conditions. We are to fulfil all the responsibilities connected with our being here on earth, and the Spirit is life to this end, but all our blessing centres in a risen, glorified Man, who is separated by death and resurrection from the conditions of human life in which for the moment we are. We shall soon be ushered into the same blessed conditions in which He is, and then will come the time of unhindered enjoyment.

In the ways of God we are on this earth, living in different places, and set together in our respective families. It is not by accident that we are born into a certain family. Some time ago a young mother showed me her baby. I asked her, Why is this particular baby yours, and not that of someone else? We must see that the family setting is in relation to God's thoughts, and that is why christian blessing embraces the household. We baptise our children in faith, that is our side, but God has made them our children

by design. Only in this way can we understand the household setting. The idea is that family life with its peculiar intimacy, affections and exercises, is to contribute to the education of each member. The father learns headship; the mother subjection; the children rule—all in the setting of family liberty and affection, as apart from the world altogether. God has given us in the household a sphere where light shines as it did in the land of Goshen. Around is darkness, with its works, but the household of the believer is under divine protection, so that what God has brought in is able to function, as apart from the conflict in which we are always engaged in the world. In other words, it is a sphere where we learn the power of love. There too, we learn to qualify for the care of the assembly, as in I Timothy. Thus the home has to do with education in the finer sensibilities, and not so much with the restraint of evil as with the influence of love. Perhaps nowhere else do we acquire such a sense of dependence, and it is only as we are formed in the divine nature that we can influence by love. Christ is Head to the assembly, and as such He can and does hold every member

in love. As head of a house² a man must walk in the company of the Lord to learn how He rules ; then he can rule his house as having a definite relation to the assembly, as supporting it. Even through the realisation of one's failure in this sphere we may learn some feature of Christ.

Then take the woman's side. She is said to rule the house, but not her husband. A man rules his house as subject to Christ; a woman rules her house as subject to her husband. She is even to look to him for light (I Cor. xiv. 34). It is a most healthy thing for a woman to ask her husband questions. Perhaps he cannot answer them, but even so, it will promote an exercise, and send him to the Head that he might be able to do so. It is of divine ordering that we learn at home the principle of headship, and in this way all are cast on the Lord, and we learn to discern the kind of movements He will make in the assembly. A woman is excluded from the care meeting as having no part in discussion and investigation. She is not in any way excluded from spiritual judgment, but she is from discussion. How often it is apparent that the woman has taken what belongs to the

field of discussion, and thus divine order is set aside with resulting weakness. Yet how often a man's judgment is altered when he has talked things over with his wife. If we could regard the family sphere as educational in all the finer sensibilities which bear directly upon the assembly, how much it would help us.

Now I turn to another sphere, that is the world. It is most noteworthy that God leaves His people in the world. In the Lord's prayer in John xvii. He expressly states "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world," showing clearly that they were left in it for a purpose. The Lord prayed that we should be kept from the evil of it. The monastic idea is to be shut away from the evil of the world, but the divine idea is to be kept from the evil which surrounds us on every hand. We are kept from evil as we learn to love good. In the world the mighty power of Satan is displayed. Look at its conforming power ! Wherever you go, in every country, people think alike, their ways are alike and they dress alike. Fashions are international. The worldlings are like bricks ; for the greatest product of Egypt

is bricks, and they are all alike. God has left us in such a scene for a definite educational end. Look at the people of God, they speak the same things, yet every one is different. Each represents some feature of the work of God; He duplicates nothing, having power in variety, quality and quantity. In this setting we learn to long and pray for the work of God. As we look at the children and what they have to face, we pray for the work of God in them, for the world is a seething mass of evil from which arises moral defilement. It is in such a scene that the Lord has left His people. It is an evidence of His absolute triumph that He could leave them here, for His power can bring them through unscathed and untainted. What impressions we learn of His victory as we thus walk in a hostile scene; and how we learn to distinguish the work of God in the moral fragrance arising from it! We want to be exercised to get the gain of our short sojourn here in this world.

I have often pondered on the marvellous skill with which the Lord has placed us in local companies, which is another sphere in which we are set down here. It is no accident that we are in a certain place.

Even a brother going to a place in self-will is not an accident. The Lord would make even a self-willed brother a gain to his brethren. Of course He will deal with the self-will ; but the point is, that as set together in local assemblies, the Lord's dealings with each one are to be of educational value to all. We come from different social circles, rich and poor, naturally very dissimilar ; having different tastes, different minds, different bents, yet the Lord fits us together. In the world people band together because of similarity of taste or aims, as for instance, a love of music, but they do not subordinate everything else in life to that one thing. But the believer is privileged to subordinate his household, his business, and his health to the assembly. There we learn to make room for one another ; to consider for one another ; perhaps some of weak conscience ; or we learn how to instruct a brother without losing him. We learn divine order, administration, shepherdship, all, as set together. Every brother and sister is a lesson book, as we note the Lord's ways with them. Some are surprised when difficult questions present themselves, but we are at school. What else can we expect as at school but

lessons? The Lord sees to it that we get our lessons. What an education a care meeting is. I sometimes think that Elihu, in the book of Job, was a good brother for a care meeting. He could sit and listen to chapters of talk that he knew was all wrong and beside the real point, and say nothing. What an education for a brother who is perhaps at business all day, settling important matters quickly, to sit down in the evening with a number of humble or simple persons, and hear a long discussion about something that seems to him petty, and yet be quiet and patient as recognising that the natural abilities that have enabled him to get through the day are of no avail in God's house. Again, out in the world a man needs to carry a sword. He is in a scene of conflict, but when he hangs up his hat in the meeting, he hangs up his sword with it! If he carried his sword in there, he might slay a brother. What an education all this is! How it would develop divine features, and what is of God.

In such circumstances we learn that he that ruleth his own spirit is greater than he that ruleth a city. How wonderful is the skill that can give us all the education required to rule cities in a day to come,

by the exercises of a small meeting, perhaps of two or three brothers. We can have every lesson in a company of just a few. It is not only the large meetings provide education. With a few we can see the working of things in great variety. The Lord allows difficulties to come in, in an obscure form ; in fact, the questions calling for discernment to-day are getting more and more obscure outwardly. The difficulty of focussing the trouble upon one principle or one person, is very great, but out of these circumstances wisdom comes. We learn the subtleties of the enemy acting through the flesh. In the future day of display, God will have persons in the church who are able to judge of every matter under the sun. They will have been educated in small meetings, amongst a few brethren, some of them very difficult, and the more difficult they are, the greater the education.

Turning now to our circumstances in life, I believe this to be a most valuable sphere of education. It represents the Lord's hand directly. In our circumstances He can restrain, subdue, or limit us. He can make them irksome, to teach us patience ; or severe, to teach us endurance ; or meagre, to teach us con-

fidence. He can break self-will in us ; He can weaken the power of nature. What a valuable thing poverty has been ! The enemy may make the saints poor, but that very thing results in enrichment. The Lord was poor, as living in a world where He might have claimed everything, but in grace He was made like unto His brethren. Indeed He went lower than any other ; laid in a manger, crucified on a cross, buried in the grave of another ; and between those points having not where to lay His head. But from the lowest point He has ascended to the highest. All power is in His hands ! He could make every one of His people rich ; He could change our circumstances completely, for He it is who controls them. But they serve in His hands as education, and if we take them thus we shall profit. If we try to live in them and enjoy them we shall be disappointed. The Lord may have to bring in a calamity, something that will cast us absolutely on God. He can bring in circumstances for which there seems no explanation whatever, but He does so that we may learn to trust Him, and trust Him implicitly, when everything seems to be a denial of His love. Where else and how else, could

we learn all this, save in the circumstances of human life? Soon the painful time of learning will be over, and we shall enter into the joy. We shall thank Him then for every bit of education which leads us into the appreciation of His ways as learned here on earth.

May the Lord grant us to see definitely that growth is connected with earth, and enjoyment with heaven. We are to-day in God's school, learning wonderful lessons, under the teaching of divine Persons; apprehending this, life will become profitable. We shall not be overwhelmed with doubt when the way is hard, but as submitting to the will of God we shall gather an appreciation of His ways and of the blessedness of the divine end in view.



THE BROAD HIGHWAYS

Romans viii. 28-29; Acts ix. 10-15 and 17;

II Samuel xii. 9-13.

I KNOW that the elder brethren will bear with me patiently in speaking of things that are well known to them, for I have it upon my heart to seek to help the young people into the vast realm of the thoughts of God. I desire to show you how to find your way about, as it were, in the scriptures, how to indentify the *great* movements of God. I notice that many of the Lord's people seem to be more or less dependent ón verses or parts of verses which they gather here and there in the scriptures—little thoughts of comfort or cheer—precious indeed—yet little when compared to the vast thoughts of God's word, the unfolding of His mind. Others again are dependent upon meetings.

One would not disparage what may be gathered in this way, yet at the same time one is assured that God's thought for all of us is that we should be able to stand upon our own feet, as it were, not independent of the brethren, or of ministry and gift, but getting the gain of all the Spirit's

activities through these channels ; but not only so but adding something to it in the way of individual gain which you will get as you prayerfully read the scriptures in the light of the unfolding of God's *great* movements. In this way any precious thought of Christ, or any fresh apprehension of Him will be enlarged or beautified as you are able to definitely connect it in your mind with the greatest thoughts of God. Our God is a great God and every movement of His is great and blessed in itself, and all His movements, as I hope to show, are related to the greatest thing in scripture, and that is, that God should have something for Himself, for His own eternal pleasure and delight. To limit one's study of the word of God to noticing only that which relates to the meeting of man's need is to think and move in a small sphere ; but to touch the sphere of divine pleasure is to get away from oneself as an object or centre, and to give God His true place as the object and end of all His blessed movements.

Before I pass on to the consideration of the scriptures read, suffer me to speak a word to the young men. I have observed in the recent years of my life that to be a

man of God in the full sense one cannot be a specialist in the scriptures. You cannot hold or emphasise any one feature of truth to the weakening of another. To apprehend the greatness of divine movements you must be in the light of the mind of God as revealed in both the Old and New Testaments. Some are specialists in the former, some in the Psalms, some again in a particular Epistle, but if I may be permitted to give a word of counsel, it is, do not be a specialist ; have nothing less before your soul than to be a *man*, a man of God, thoroughly furnished by *all* scripture. If you seek to follow these lines you will secure the help of the Spirit and your right hand will be as strong and skilful as your left. "The legs of the lame are not equal" (Prov. xxvi. 7). God would make you to grow up comely and strong so that your eye will be as discerning as your ear, your mind equal to your affections, the movements of your feet—indicating service—corresponding to what is in your heart. Have nothing less than this before you, dear young brother—to hold all the truth in its perfect balance and perfection.

Now, it was something of this pressing upon my spirit that encourages me to

speak, as grace may be given, on the subject of what I may call the *broad highways*. In Judges v. 6 we read "In the days of Shamgar the son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the highways were unoccupied, and the travellers walked through byways." The days referred to were days of intense weakness which continued until a "mother in Israel arose." The spiritual significance is that the great thoughts of God were for the moment neglected. Scripture refers to highways and byways, cities and villages; in short, everything is not of equal importance. Some things are greater than others. The *broad highways*, as I love to think of them, are four in number. These four main roads run right through the scriptures. They cannot be mistaken or confused when once they have been identified. Once the map is before the soul, and you perceive where these main roads begin, and where they lead to, you can ponder with never-failing delight on the word of God in all its vastness, in all the minute perfection of its detail, and be able to identify whatever feature occupies you with one of the four main highways. You may see a little bit of ornamentation, a feature of the beautiful handiwork of

God, and as you are able to identify it with one of the broad highways, its beauty will be enhanced as you place it in your mind in the setting given to it by the divine mind.

It is characteristic of God's movements that they are fourfold. Scripture speaks of four points of the compass, north, south, east and west. There are four gospels which detail the life of Christ; these four, as apprehended in our souls, give us a sense of one glorious whole. Men have introduced all kinds of intermediate points but God moves in straight and clearly defined lines. These are, first, His movements in *purpose*; second, His movements in *sovereignty*; third, His movements in His *ways*; and fourth, His movements in *government*.

I do not attempt to unfold the detail of these fourfold movements; all that is on my mind is to give you a suggestion that they are there, to show you how you can identify them, to see the relation of one to the other, and how those that are relatively lesser contribute towards the end of securing the greatest thing, the most wonderful thing, that is, the *pleasure of God*. I am sure that every christian in this room will at once see that anything

that can minister to the pleasure of God eternally is the most blessed and the greatest thing that can occupy the attention of men. Some here to-night may not have progressed much further than to have apprehended the work of Christ as meeting their need, and may say with very real joy, "He died for me." It is very blessed to be able to say that of the Lord Jesus, but there is a possibility of saying that in such a way as to make yourself the centre and object of His work. If this is so, however blessed and joyful it may be to you, it is a small thought. I would not weaken the joy of the feeblest apprehension of the work of Christ, but I would like you to find your feet on the broad highways and to perceive that He died also to remove all that had come in—sin and death—in order that those blessed purposes and counsels of the will of God in all their vast meaning and blessedness might be given effect to. This thought of the death of Christ makes God the centre, and has in view that eternity may yield to the heart of God all that His heart longs for.

God's movements in purpose can be identified by this key, that they are connected with His love. Purpose is a move-

ment of love. It does not stand in relation to anything other than the pleasure and love of God : that is purpose. It refers to those great counsels of blessing that divine Persons planned long before time began, before there was any question of need or breakdown amongst men. The purpose of God has no direct relation to need or failure. As scripture presents it, it stands related to the holy love of God. It is a movement of love not limited to the time scene and it will never come to an end ; it is an eternal thought. Things that come to an end are provisional and are not part of His purpose. Things that are but for a period are connected with His ways. For instance, the world to come—the millennial day—it will come to an end. It continues for a thousand years—a long time—but it will terminate, therefore it cannot be a part of His purpose but belongs to His ways. His purpose is like a straight line which comes out of eternity and goes into eternity, which passes through the interval of time, without deflection or divergence on God's part. God has never departed by a hairsbreadth from His purpose. Men make plans ; they draw up designs of buildings, machinery or works, and as the

plan is executed it is found that alterations have to be made. Here is something that was not provided for ; there something that can be improved, or after the work is finished another and better design can be drawn as the result of experience gained, but the purpose of God cannot be improved : it is according to counsel. (Eph. i. 11). Think of divine Persons in counsel ! Counsel suggests that more than one is engaged as to that which would minister to the divine pleasure ; all has its origin, its blessed origin, in the will of God. He works all things according to the counsel of His own will.

I want now to show you, dear brethren, that God has not been diverted from His purpose in the smallest degree. He brought Adam into the world, but he was not the man of God's purpose ; he was as we read, the figure of Him that was to come. The bringing in of Adam was not a movement of purpose. You may say, how do you know that ? Well, the answer is that Adam failed. Nothing that is connected with God's purpose can fail. His purpose has in view that men should be conformed to the image of His Son (Rom. viii. 29). He wanted men like Christ in every moral feature, and what

a point is gained in our souls when we apprehend this. "Except a corn (the grain) of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone : but if die, it bringeth forth much fruit." (John xii. 24). It was all alone ; not another like it. The purpose of God called for men like Christ—His brethren—of whom He would be the first-born, the pre-eminent One. That was God's eternal thought, and He is now securing it. The first man was formed out of the dust of the earth ; was breathed into by God and thus made a living soul ; but God's purpose was to have men like Christ, and the only way God could secure men morally like Christ is that "the grain" must die. It is only out of death that fruit like unto the grain is secured. In Genesis i. we read "God said, Let the earth bring forth grass and the earth brought forth grass." Note it sprang out of the earth. "He shall see of the fruit of the travail of his soul."

I turn now to speak of God's ways. Adam as created in the image of God was made the centre of a vast system over which he had universal dominion, but failing in his responsibility God brought out in His ways the principles which will

ultimately be established in power by Christ, when all will be headed up in Him in the administration of the fulness of times. Thus He will be the last Adam, the true Noah, the One in whom all the promises will be yea and amen, the true Son of David, and the head of the Gentile world. This will be the issue of God's ways. Every position man was placed in he broke down in, but God will glorify Himself by His ways in Christ, who will take up and maintain for God every position in which man failed. The rejection of Christ, in whom all will be accomplished, closed God's dealings with the earth, and before the means of blessing can be made good in power, Christ must return. But meanwhile, on the ground that the question of sin, which had come into the world has been settled by the death and resurrection of Christ, God brings in the glad tidings of His grace by which He is effecting His purpose, and there is no possibility of God's purpose failing in achievement. If you quietly contemplate this you will get a sense of the greatness of God. He was not taken unawares by the failure of man. He was not unprepared, and when the failure came in, He developed in His ways the prin-

ciples which He will yet establish publicly, and by which He will be glorified. But as the result of the death of Christ, where God's nature was met in regard of the question of sin, and of His resurrection, the gospel has come into the world to effect His purpose. How great and wonderful are His thoughts !

All is being effected on the principle of resurrection, and therefore no power of man or the devil can thwart the accomplishment of divine purposes and they are being given effect to now, but all based upon the work of our Lord Jesus Christ. What a work that was ! The public establishment of every divine principle on this earth in the day to come, when Christ the Lord will come again, and the accomplishment of God's eternal purposes, are all based upon it. The death and resurrection of Christ are the righteous foundations upon which all will be established and accomplished. How enlarging it is to contemplate this ! How it delivers us from smallness of thought and from being self-centred ! What meaning is connected with His death as our minds are expanded to take account of the broad highways !

My death does not accomplish anything.

True, it takes me out of this scene and brings my period of education to a close, but the death of Christ has vast meaning in connection with the will of God. God's ways are provisional, they are for time, and are to work out moral ends ; after that they will cease, but eternal counsels are in view of eternity, and are accomplished for the pleasure of God and for the satisfaction of His love. May we all yield ourselves more to the operations of God's Holy Spirit in us, Who is forming and fashioning us in view of God's eternal day.

In God's ways as they apply to us personally, you and I are in this scene of tribulation. Are you feeling the pressure and sorrow of it ? It is only for a time. Peter says, " After that ye have suffered awhile , " that is in God's ways—a little while. The suffering is in the time scene and there is a limit to it. In God's ways with me I learn His marvellous wisdom. I may not always follow His ways for Paul says, " How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out ! " (Rom. xi. 33). I do not need to try to find out or understand them, but in the faith of my soul I can see where they lead to and what they produce.

In blessed contrast to this, scripture would encourage us to seek to understand God's purposes in Christ; nothing is hidden there. It was in mystery but is now fully revealed (Eph. i. 9). What we are in Christ, in the thoughts of God, is all connected with His blessed purposes of love. In His ways with us we learn His compassion, His tenderness, His care for His people, and we learn, too, to glory in the God that can bring His people triumphantly through such circumstances. In His ways the sorrow, the tribulation, the pain, and weariness are all measured with divine skill to produce something for eternity. It is not part of God's purpose that we should suffer; it belongs to the sphere of His ways, so that whatever is connected with suffering and pressure is in the time scene and we can take courage as we pass through the wilderness, in the knowledge that His ways are necessary. Every drop that He puts into the cup is for us all measured. You may look back to some deep sorrow in your life which at the moment seemed like an avalanche, but, dear friend, every particle of it was measured in the wisdom and perfection of God's ways. God takes no pleasure in suffering; it is what suffering produces

that God delights in. It is in His ways that He "repented . . . that he made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart." Such a passage suggests that God felt deeply the failure of what was on His side a perfect movement. For forty years He bore with the people of Israel, followed them in their wanderings, waited for them, and went after them ; all in His ways.

And now, let me briefly indicate the movements of God's sovereignty and God's government. I think you will find that sovereignty and purpose are linked together as are His ways and government. Without a movement of sovereignty God could not have accomplished His purpose, for when He created man in innocence he fell ; when He gave him the law he failed to keep it, and when God drew near to men in grace they refused Him. Can you conceive God leaving Himself without resource in such a situation ? If that were possible, then the breakdown or refusal on the part of man could hinder God's purposes of blessing being put into effect, but it was not possible. So, running all through scripture you will find one of the broad highways is the sovereign movement of the blessed God. His

sovereignty is His right to do as He will without regard for any creature. His sovereignty does not in any way becloud His righteousness, for they do not conflict, but as God He is supreme. He chose us in Christ ; it was a sovereign movement. Why did He do it ? I do not know, but I can rejoice that He has done it.

Sovereignty comes to light in the history of Abraham ; the whole world was given over to idolatry. What is God's resource in such a situation ? It was a movement of sovereignty. He said to Abraham, " I will bless thee, and make thy name great." He did not put conditions upon Abraham, but He put conditions upon Himself by the bond of an oath, and although Abraham's faith answered to this unconditional blessing, the movement was all on God's side ; it was a movement of sovereignty and necessary to ensure God's purpose. He is the potter ; He has the " power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour." (Rom. ix. 21).

The mind of man will not tolerate the thought of God's sovereignty. If there is one feature of God's movement that the flesh rebels against it is His right to choose

in sovereignty. His movements of sovereignty are not manifested until men have refused all other overtures. It is when men have refused to be what His heart seeks for, that the light of sovereignty shines as one of the broad highways. This highway can be identified in that it is not related so much to man's need as to God's purpose. The Lord said, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you." (John xv. 16). The movement was all on His side—a sovereign movement. Flesh rebels against it, but faith accepts it.

Sovereignty is seen in two ways: in choosing men for blessing in Christ, and in the distribution of gifts. How noticeable it is in scripture that the Lord will not tolerate any interference with His sovereign movements. When He spoke to Ananias about Saul of Tarsus, Ananias displayed great hesitation until the Lord said, "He is a chosen vessel unto me," thereby indicating to Ananias that it was a movement of sovereignty to which he must bow. How happily he bowed! He went straight to the man whose name was so dreaded, and putting his hands on him said, "*Brother* Saul." If it was the Lord's choice, it was all right, and

Ananias recognises the family relationship at once. We get another instance of the same kind of thing in Numbers xii., where Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses. They made the occasion of their complaint that he had married an Ethiopian woman; what they might call an excuse, but not an honest one, for the real issue is suggested in their words, "Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses? Hath He not spoken also by us?" How quickly the Lord heard and moved in regard to this questioning of His sovereign movement in putting Moses over the people! He called them before the tabernacle of the congregation and there He brought to light what was at the bottom of their questions. It was a bit of unjudged flesh working in both of them, but more actively in Miriam, seeing that her name is put before that of Aaron (ver. i)—a little bit of intolerance on her part of Jehovah's sovereign movements, and when He brought to the surface that which had been working underneath she became leprous, white as snow. We read that Aaron looked upon Miriam, and, behold, she was leprous. He saw fully developed in her that which had been at work in his own soul, and he said unto Moses—not to

Jehovah, but to Moses of whom he had been jealous—"Lay not the sin upon *us*." The flesh always rebels most strongly against God's sovereign movement. Dear brethren, if there is one thing we must bow to, without hesitancy, and without question, it is the sovereign movements of the Lord in His choice of His brethren, and in the distribution of gifts. How many we have seen turn aside because they have refused to recognise the sovereignty of the Lord in giving a place of prominence to another! It is flesh, and the Lord brings it to the surface. Now these are just a few indications of sovereignty; I trust you will follow me in it. Whenever you detect the Lord in a movement of sovereignty, bow to it quickly, for it will mean much blessing. The Lord is graciously pleased to indicate to any honest inquirer if any such movement is of Himself. If we do not bow, we shall come under the hand of God in government.

Now government is the remaining one of the broad highways which we have under consideration. I have already suggested that God's government is definitely connected with His ways. I think I can show you the connection.

God's ways with us indicate His compassion, His tenderness, His care and interest, His patience and forbearance with men. If we had not the light of God's fourfold movements, and had only the light of His compassions, we might get a wrong impression of God. We might think that He was not holy. His government gives us to see that He is holy, and it always accompanies His ways. Along with every manifestation of His compassions and interest in men is the manifestation of His government. His government maintains, in the eyes of the universe, that He is a *holy* God. His government is the working of fixed principles which never change "For whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. vi. 7). That is God's government; the sowing and the reaping are definitely related to each other. One loves to think that God's government is tempered for His saints. He added fifteen years to the days of Hezekiah. When David sinned the Lord said, "The sword shall never depart from thine house," but He also said, "Thou shalt not die." There we see the working of God's government. David had killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword; that was a

sowing and the reaping was that the sword should never depart from his house.

God's government operates in two ways, "For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Gal. vi. 8). In I Timothy v. 9 - 10, instruction is authoritatively given as to the provision to be made for a widow who had been well reported of for good works. Here again we see the operation of government; the good works is the sowing, and the care of the saints for her is the reaping.

One has observed the workings of God's government amongst the brethren. For instance, I know a brother who through many years of his life kept the brethren at a distance. He liked only to mix with them on official lines and in the meetings, and outside his own home there was an invisible fence which advised the poorer brethren that they could come so far but no further. This brother grew old; he began to feel lonely and desired the companionship of the brethren. He tore down the fence, so to speak, and opened his arms, but the brethren did not respond to the invitation. They stood where the

fence had been ; God's government ! You think little of a thing to-day ; to-morrow you will want it ; you cannot have it ; God's government ! In government God perfectly co-relates one thing with another. A bitter word, that is meant to hurt, which passes the lips lightly, a thing so small in the eyes of the speaker that it is soon forgotten, will involve the working of God's government. Do not allow wrong impressions of God, impressions which will give you a licence which would be checked if you recognised His government. Refuse mercy to another, and it will be refused to you ; " With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again " (Matt. vii. 2). He is a compassionate and merciful God, but He cannot be untrue to Himself, and side by side with His tender compassionate movements, is His holy government. Hosea speaks about it ; " They have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind : it hath no stalk : the bud shall yield no meal : if so be it yield, the strangers shall swallow it up." (Hos. viii. 7). That sarcastic remark, that proud word, will come back as a whirlwind. God in government misses nothing. His eyes see everywhere. " The eyes of the Lord run to and fro

throughout the whole earth, beholding the evil and the good." The seed sown is weighed and measured and there it awaits the reaping, and one day—for time is nothing to God—it comes back. The consideration of these things should solemnise us. It is written, "Our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. xii. 29). Moses said, "I exceedingly fear and quake" (Heb. xii. 21). While all this is intensely solemn it is encouraging to see that God's government is contributory to His purpose, and always in favour of the righteous, so that while we have a sense of holy fear in regard of it, we see that God in all His blessed movements is altogether for us, never against us. I believe the workings of God's government make way in our souls for the apprehension of His purpose. We could not conceive that any one movement of our God could defeat the purpose His heart is set upon. In the light of this we take courage, for while His government may put us on our backs in pain, may limit our movements amongst the brethren, it will never defeat the greater object of securing all the blessed purpose of God in Christ. What God set Himself to do in the past eternity, what He purposed in Christ, He will do.

I feel I have given but a feeble suggestion of what was on my mind, but I trust it may awaken interest and inquiry as to these things, for as you apprehend the main highways of scripture, and see the great end in view, you will be able to compare one thing with another. Comparison has in view the apprehension of what is greater. In bringing these things to your notice my desire is that the younger brethren might find their feet in the things of God, and while getting the gain of the meetings, yet not to be altogether dependent upon them. May the Lord give enlargement in regard of these great things, for His name's sake.