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Responsibility in Assembly Building In Connection with the Word of God

1 Corinthians 3
Alex. Matthews

We have here a building in which there is a human responsibility. Paul as a wise master-builder laid the foundation of the Assembly at Corinth. He received the pattern of the Assembly from God; also the dispensation thereof, Ephesians 3:9, R.V. He was a foreman builder, who understood the plans and specifications of the Architect. Moses received the plan of the Tabernacle from God, Exodus 25:9. David received the pattern of the Temple from God, 2 Chronicles 28:19. Paul says, "I have laid the foundation." He addresses the Assembly as a whole; and the foundation of the Assembly was Jesus Christ, the ground of their unity; and Christ as Lord, the center of their unity. Paul had left Corinth, after a year and six months teaching the Word of God among them, and now others were taking the place of builders. In Israel the rulers and elders were the builders, Acts 4:8-11.

From this we conclude that those taking the oversight are the builders in an Assembly of God. At least, overseers have the first responsibility in reference to the order and purity of an Assembly of God. It is a deeply important matter to begin an Assembly. It requires a wise master-builder who knows the divine pattern; and also the proper material; see Acts 11:22-26. Meetings have begun to break bread that have never been gathered unto the Lord Jesus Christ, as God's only center of divine unity. To be truly gathered is as much the work of the Spirit of God as the quickening of a sinner dead in trespasses and sins, 1 Corinthians 12:3. Paul had been used in bringing these living stones together, around the Lord Jesus Christ, but they were in great danger of being corrupted, therefore he charges those taking part in the Assembly to be deeply exercised as to what they brought into the house of God, whether it be as to persons, doctrines, or practices.

There is a danger of building in wood, hay or stubble. Wood would suggest human greatness, as the

cedar of Lebanon. Hay might suggest that which would nourish nature, but is perishing, "the grass withereth." Stubble was once used in making bricks—imitation stones. In contrast to these things we have what will stand the test of God's holiness. Gold is the symbol of divine glory. In the Temple every whit of it uttered His glory, Psalm 29:9. (margin). Silver is the type of redemption, Exodus 30:15. Precious stones refers to the large costly stones of which Solomon's temple was built. God alone can make living stones. God's glory must be the first principle by which to test every thing brought into a house of God. On the ground of redemption God will dwell in the midst of His people, if holiness be maintained by those fitly framed together. God will yet manifest His holy judgment concerning the material that has been built into that which professes His Name.

The construction and ordering of a house of God; which is a Church of the living God. (1 Timothy 3:15, Rotherham) is what is here dealt with. All will be tested according to God's infinite holiness, and what is not of God will be eternal loss to the builder. This in its primary application is addressed to those who are the guides. But there will be none excepted; every man's work will be tried. As a condemned sinner, I was judged at the cross in the person of my blessed Surety. As a child of God I must judge myself continually or I will be judged and chastened of the Lord, "God dealeth with you as with sons, for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not," Hebrews 12:7. As servants, in the various spheres where God has placed us, our life work is to be manifested at the judgment seat of Christ. "The day will declare it" refers to the day of Christ. The fire that will reveal every man's work of what sort it is, is a

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symbol of the holiness of God, see Leviticus 9:24. Is ours to be a lost life or one that will abide the fire? Mark the distinction that God makes between a man and his work in verse 15. "If any man's work shall he burned, he shall suffer loss ; but he himself shall he saved yet so as by fire." The man is saved, but his whole life's work lost. This is illustrated in the case of Lot; he was saved from burning, but lost all. Abraham was saved with all that he had. See also 1 Chronicles 11:10; when David received the kingdom he rewarded those who shared his rejection according to their past, faithfulness. There is a manifest kingdom coming. The place of honor and authority in that kingdom will be appointed according to our faithfulness in service in our respective spheres here during His rejection. See 2 Peter 1:11.

Where the house of God is seen as entrusted to human responsibility there is a possibility of its being corrupted, so it is written: "If any man corrupt (or defile) the temple of God, him will God corrupt." He who by introducing unsound teaching, unfit persons. or principles of compromise, in man's fleshly wisdom, instead of the pure Word of God in the power of the Spirit, or unscriptural practices into an Assembly of God is corrupting God's temple, God's house; and the corrupter, if a child of God, will not only lose reward for his labor, but will also come under the chastening hand of God here and now. The party spirit causing schisms, and what appears to be judicial blindness to what they once saw in God's Word, no doubt is the governmental effects upon some who have corrupted God's Assemblies. There are a number of instances in the Scriptures of God's servants becoming corrupted. The "man of God" of 1 Kings 13:19 became corrupted and fell under God's judgment. Hymenaeus and Alexander corrupted the truth, and, putting away a good conscience, became so corrupted themselves that they had be delivered over to Satan, 1 Timothy 1:20.

Holiness must characterize God's house, "Which ye are"-- this refers to the Assembly at Corinth in its corporate capacity--if the Lord is to dwell among us. The apostle speaks, in chapter 6: 19, of the believer's body being the temple of the Holy Spirit, but here the temple is the Assembly of God. "Where two are three are, having been gathered together unto my Name; there am I in the midst of them," Matthew 18:20 (Newberry). When thus gathered unto the Lord Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit, in obedience to His Word, He is in the midst as truly as if every believer were there; although there may not be the same energy of the Spirit. Where the authority of Christ as Lord is owned, and His Word the alone appeal, such is an Assembly of God according to the pattern given by God. But just as what God called the house of the Lord, 1 Kings 8:10, had become so corrupted that the Lord Jesus disowned it saying your

house is left unto you desolate, Matthew 23:39, so an Assembly of God may become so corrupted, the Lord's absolute authority and order so set aside, that He will disown it. If there is not room for the Word of God to come in and cleanse it, it has become your own meeting, not His Assembly.

The solemn responsibility of those taking oversight, and of others in their measure, to guard the order and preserve the purity of an Assembly, should lead to prayerful vigilance, knowing that an account must be rendered to God.

The Gospel According to David, Psalm 22, pt. 5

Robert Surgenor

Having accomplished the work of glorifying God and accomplishing redemption for us, God ceased to afflict Him, and heard His cry. God's face had been hidden for hours, but now the price of our redemption had been paid, and God showed His face, and delivered His Darling from the traumatic sufferings of Calvary.

Christ Paying His Vows - Vs. 25-26

"My praise shall be of Thee in the great congregation: I will pay My vows before them that fear Him. The meek shall eat and be satisfied: they shall praise the LORD that seek Him: your heart shall live for ever."

Another rendering of the first six words in this utterance could be rendered, "My praise shall be from Thee ..." Thus we have two thoughts. First: Christ returns thanks to His God for His great deliverance, and we as imitators of Him, do the same. We worship the Father in spirit and in truth, and all our praise is directed to Him. Paul relates to this; "I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also" (1 Corinthians 14:15).

Second: True praise is of celestial origin. It is through the help of the Holy Spirit that saints lift their hearts in praise to God.

"Vows" in the plural are mentioned seven times in the Psalms, verse 25 being the first occurrence. Often connected with vows is the peace offering (Leviticus 7:11-21), where God received His portion (the fat and the two kidneys), the priestly family, and the family of the offerer ate their portions of the sacrifice, all in fellowship with each other. Jewish historians tell us that it was customary in times of great distress to make vows which usually consisted of a promise to offer a number of sacrifices. After deliverance was obtained, the cus-

tom was to invite orphans, widows and others that were poor to the feast, to make them sharers of the festive joy. The guests not only enjoyed the feast, but also the friendship of the master of the feast. The heart of the feast was admission into the community of thanksgiving and praise.

Our Lord, expressing His gratitude for God's deliverance, has provided for all His redeemed a feast in which we all take part. Thus we see, God satisfied, the priestly family satisfied, and the offerer and his family satisfied. Eternal life is theirs.

Applying this event today; if we feast on what God feasts on, we will be satisfied. If we feast on what the world has to offer we can never be satisfied. Humans desire to feel a sense of satisfaction, that all is well. Most strive for this in life. However, how are most seeking to achieve satisfaction? Sad to say, in their spiritual blindness, most are seeking satisfaction in the wrong way. In their self-centeredness, they lust after the world's entertainment and pleasures. If we grasp the general instruction contained within the sacrifices, we ought to be able to understand how spiritually damaging self-centeredness and striving for the wrong goals in life are. Self-centeredness produces the opposite fruit of self-sacrifice.

Self-centeredness does not feed and strengthen a sense of satisfaction and contentment. It destroys through spiritual malnutrition, producing a hunger or craving for more of what never satisfies. As Solomon said when speaking of the emptiness of a self-centered life; "All things are full of labour...The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing" (Ecclesiastes 1:8). We often sing:

O Christ, in Thee my soul hath found,
And found in Thee alone,
The peace, the joy I sought so long,
The bliss till now unknown.

I tried the broken cisterns, Lord,
But, ah, the waters failed!
E'en as I stooped to drink they fled,
And mocked me as I wailed.

Chorus:

Now none but Christ can satisfy,
None other name for me;
There's love and life and lasting joy,
Lord Jesus, found in Thee.

However, the question arises, can you sing this hymn truthfully? If you can honestly answer, "Yes," then I take it for granted that the TV shows hold no attraction for you, neither do the sports events, or any other frivolous pleasures that the world dangles before

the eyes of those blindly walking on the broad way that leadeth to destruction.

This is borne out in the next statement; "The meek shall eat and be satisfied." This activity is termed holy fellowship. "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3). The psalmist exclaimed, "With my whole heart have I sought Thee" (Psalm 119:10). Why eat the world's spiritual garbage, when one can feast on the delicacies spread out in God's banqueting house? "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled" (Matthew 5:6). "He hath filled the hungry with good things" (Luke 1:53).

You will notice that it is the meek that eat and are satisfied. Who are the meek? Well, the word is also translated, "humble, poor," and "lowly." True Christians think very little of themselves. Even the great apostle Paul exclaimed, "I am less than the least of all saints" (Ephesians 3:8). How different from the ungodly man's appreciation of himself. Christ was "meek and lowly in heart" (Matthew 11:29), and this also should characterize His people.

Lord Jesus, Thou who only art
The endless source of purest joy,
O! come and fill this longing heart -
May nought but Thee my thoughts employ.
Teach me on Thee to fix my eye,
For none but Thee can satisfy.

The joys of earth can never fill
The heart that's tasted of Thy love;
No portion will I seek until
I reign with Thee, my Lord above,
When I shall gaze upon Thy face,
And know more fully all Thy grace.

Universal Worship - Vs. 27

"All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the LORD: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before Thee."

The word "remember" bears the thought of "laying it to heart." The Spirit of God will work universally. Men have forgotten God, but in the day of our Lord's universal reign every knee shall bow and acknowledge Him as King of kings, and Lord of lords. Many monarchs have sought to rule the entire world only to fail. Never has there been a mortal who has caused all nations to honor him by loving him with their whole heart and soul. No! Not one! But the Spirit of God can do what the most mighty man on earth could never accomplish, and through His activity, He will change the very nature and hearts of godless men.

The thought of "turn," is to forsake all others. We see this in a very local way at Thessalonica through

Paul's preaching. They "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (1 Thessalonians 1:9).

"Kings shall fall down before Him,
and gold and incense bring;
All nations shall adore Him,
His praise all people sing;
For He shall have dominion
o'er river, sea and shore,
Far as the eagle's pinion
or dove's light wing can soar."

James Montgomery - 1771-1854

His Position Over The Nations - Vs. 28

"For the kingdom is the LORD'S: and He is the governor among the nations."

The first time you will find the word "governor" in your Bible is in Genesis 1:16-18, where we read; "And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: He made the stars also. And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth, And to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness." Just as feeble man has no power over the sun and moon, he will have no power over the Christ/Ruler of this world. Just as the sun and moon divide the light from the darkness, so the coming King will divide the sheep from the goats, as He righteously establishes His everlasting kingdom (Matthew 25:31-46). "And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles. And it shall be, that whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain. And if the family of Egypt go not up, and come not, that have no rain; there shall be the plague, where-with the LORD will smite the heathen that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles. This shall be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all nations that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles. In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD; and the pots in the LORD'S house shall be like the bowls before the altar" (Zechariah 14:16-20).

Universal Blessing- Vs. 29

"All they that be fat upon earth shall eat and worship: all they that go down to the dust shall bow before Him: and none can keep alive his own soul."

The fat are those who are mighty and rich, and those who go down to the dust are the miserably poor. All will be invited in that day to partake of God's great salvation. None can keep alive his own soul. The cross

alone will meet the worshipper's spiritual needs, and will be the source of all material blessing.

Continuation and Nature of The Testimony- Vs. 30-31

"A seed shall serve Him; it shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation. They shall come, [one generation after another] and shall declare His righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that He hath done this."

Christ's seed are those who are united to Him through precious blood. Concerning the Church He says; "Behold I and the children which God hath given Me" (Hebrews 2:13). Thus from the day of Pentecost until this present day, the testimony sounds forth that Christ hath done this. Done what? - that He has wrought the righteousness revealed in this prophetic Psalm. The declaration of the cross will never die. Paul exhorted Timothy; "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2). What a tremendous legacy has been entrusted to God's people, namely the treasure of the gospel. Paul revealed in this. "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us" (2 Corinthians 4:5-7).

This tremendous Psalm ends with - "He hath done this," meaning, "it is finished." Christ has finished all the righteous, redemptive work that was detailed in this Psalm. Amazing isn't it, that over 1,000 years after the psalmist penned this Psalm, that when the work of redemption was accomplished on the Cross, our Saviour cried with a triumphant voice, "It is finished" (John 19:30). Thus the gospel according to David concludes. A Psalm that very well might have been the meditations of our Saviour's heart during His accomplishing eternal redemption for us on the cross. Hallelujah, what a Saviour!

Saviour, we remember Thee!
Thy deep woe and agony,
All Thy suffering on the tree:
Saviour, we adore Thee.

Calvary! O Calvary!
Mercy's vast unfathomed sea,
Love, eternal love to me:
Saviour, we adore Thee.

Darkness hung around Thy head,
When for sin Thy blood was shed,

Victim in the sinner's stead,
Saviour, we adore Thee.

Jesus, Lord, Thou now art risen!
Thou hast all our sins forgiven;
Haste we to our home in heaven:
Saviour, we adore Thee.

Soon, with joyful, glad surprise,
We shall hear Thy word – Arise!
Mounting upward to the skies:
Glory, glory, glory!

Saviour, we Thy love adore;
We will praise Thee more and more;
Spread Thy name from shore to shore:
Saviour, we adore Thee.

Samuel Trevor Francis - 1834–1925

Conversation about Scripture Interpretation

Samuel Rojas, (Venezuela)

(trans. from “La Sana Doctrina”, #303, Sept-Oct 2009)

It has caused me concern to be sure about proper interpretation of Scripture, like yourselves who are very sure when you interpret the Scriptures and say without hesitation that a passage signifies one thing and not another. How is it possible to interpret the Bible?

Good concern! Interpretation doesn't come from one's mere whim or somebody's imaginations. The same Word of God has its Norms, or Rules of Interpretation that it uses. The apostle Peter says something very important about the Scripture: it is not of private interpretation (2 Peter 1:20). Nobody can say that only he or she has the correct interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures.

But is this very complicated? Very extensive? What are these Rules?

I will enumerate 9 Rules of Biblical Interpretation, which I have found very simple to understand, in the form in which I heard someone explain them. It is possible to intensively amplify this study, but the following Rules are very accessible to everyone. #1, we have **The Rule of Relevance or Actuality**: the Bible is the Word of God for all times; it doesn't get old, it doesn't get out of date. So that we don't interpret it in the light of our times that we live in; we use the Bible in order to interpret our times.

OK, I understand that. Do you want to say that if the mindset of these times is in one direction and what the Bible says goes the other, I should accept “what God says”, and not have the opinion that the Bible has been superseded by human development so that it doesn't work for us today?”

An example that I have found is the divine command for women to be silent in public meetings (1 Corinthians 14:33b-35; 1 Timothy 2:11-12). There are those who argue that this was for those in Corinth, this isn't for us today because women are dignified and have arrived at the same rights as the male.

Good example. The reasons for God giving this commandment in the first century continue just as valid today as in that time. Let's pass on to the 2nd, or the **Law of Context**. A text is interpreted in the light of its context. A text, outside of its context, is a pretext. We should be careful that before we apply a portion of Scripture, we interpret it first.

I have heard concerning this that, many times, the explanation of a verse is just a little before or after that verse. We only have to read all the passage around it. Also there is the immediate context, which will correspond with the same paragraph, or even the same chapter; the larger context is the entire book, or the New or Old Testament where it is, and even in the context of the entire Bible.

Correct. This is a very important Rule. Now I will mention the 3rd, which is **the Rule of the Dispensational Setting**. That is to say, we should make a difference between Israel, the Gentiles and the Church. There are Scriptures that refer especially to one of these groups. When we use that which corresponds to one and apply it to the other, we will form a colossal mess. As one said, “Distinguish the dispensations, and the Scriptures harmonize.”

Two cases come to my mind: keeping the Sabbath, and the use of instrumental music. The first was required of Israel, under the Sinaitic covenant, but is not required in the Church (Acts 15:19, 20, 28, 29, Colossians 2:16-17). The second was for the temple in Jerusalem (Psalms 150), in the Old Covenant, but wasn't used in the Dispensation of Grace or in Christian assemblies (1 Corinthians 14:15, Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16). Other cases should exist in which this Rule will help us to correctly interpret the Scriptures.

Without a doubt. We also see the 4th Rule, that of **the Rule of Clear Sense**. It is that the Scriptures signify what they say. “The clear sense is the good sense; don't seek for another sense, because it will be without sense!” Of course, when we deal with the book of Revelation, from the beginning it tells us that it is a revelation that was given by means of symbols (1:1, “declare”, or show by signs). When the Lamb is described to us in 5:6 with 7 horns and 7 eyes, then we understand that it isn't something literal, but symbolical, in order to present His perfect power and His perfect knowledge.

Thanks be to God that we can be sure that what the Bible says, this is what it means. And, what is Rule 5?

It is **the Rule of Total Mention**, by which in order to study a subject or a fact, or a doctrine, we must seek and analyze all which the Bible says with respect to it. We

should not give an interpretation based on only one verse, or on two verses, without taking into account all the rest of the passages that speak concerning this subject. This Rule includes consideration of the First Mention that appears in the Scriptures on that subject. We always encounter, in embryo, the teaching about the subject in the first time that it is mentioned in the Bible.

I believe that I have heard someone speak in public on this Rule. For example, when we study "Ask in prayer" in the New Testament, we find that the Lord says, "Ask and it shall be given." If we only consider this verse, one could understand that if I want a rocket, God will give it to me, but it isn't like this. This is not the complete story. We find that if we ask according to His will, we will receive what we ask for; if we walk in obedience to His Word, that which we ask for, we will also receive. If we ask wrong, we will not receive, because we ask it to use it on our own desires (1 John 5:14, 3:22, James 4:3).

That's correct. And with respect to the First Mention, a classic example is "the house of God." The first mention of the "house of God" in the Scriptures is in Genesis 28:17; Jacob called "house of God" a place where there wasn't a physical construction or a building. Therefore, we see, in the unfolding of the doctrine concerning the "house of God" that God doesn't dwell in temples made with human hands (Acts 7:48-50), and that the dwelling of God in this dispensation is a spiritual house (1 Timothy 3:15, 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, Ephesians 2:20-22). It isn't biblical, then, to call a hall, a building, or even less, a religious organization, "house of God." So that this is very decisive regarding the manner in which we should gather, Matthew 18:20. There, in embryo, we see the doctrine of our gathering in His Name, without a denomination name, nor sectarian. But, I suggest that we talk more about this when we come to the last Rule.

I was just about to tell you that some say that this verse has nothing to do with an assembly gathered in the Name of the Lord. Very good, I am waiting. What is number 6?

The Rule of Comparison: the Scripture is interpreted from itself. If an interpretation of a passage is constructed, it should harmonize in that interpretation with all the Scripture. If there is just one other bible verse that doesn't support the interpretation, it isn't the correct interpretation. There are those who argue that Acts 2:38 and 10:48 say that a believer should be baptized only in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ. But in our Bible, we have Matthew 28:19, and we have to obtain an interpretation that harmonizes with all the Scripture. In Matthew 28:19 we have the formula that we should use in every Christian baptism; in Acts, we have the Authority by which we baptize every believer in Christ.

I understand that in every case, we should have chapter and verse to sustain whatever interpretation we

have. If we affirm that a passage signifies something, we should have other verses that support that conclusion, right?

That is right. Rule 6 isn't less important; it is **the Rule of Spiritual Principles**, or Positive Model. This teaches us that we shouldn't argue over the silence of the Scripture. We know that the Bible doesn't tacitly prohibit smoking cigarettes, so should we say that we can do so? As the Bible doesn't say clearly that the brethren should wear a jacket and tie, do we, as a result, not have to do so? These are invalid arguments! Because the Word says that the body of a believer is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and we should maintain it holy and glorify God in our bodies, does the Spirit of God want us to smoke tobacco?

Of course not! I understand the point. So far as the jacket and tie in the men, I have learned that the Scripture tells us that when we come to the meetings, the public gatherings, the presence of God is in the gathering, so that this calls for, even as it did, proper dress (Genesis 35:1-3, Psalms 29:2; etc.). How much more when we render public worship to the Lord?

This custom is very dignified, based on the biblical principle, that we have in all the assemblies in our country (Venezuela). We pass on, then to the last 2 rules: the **Rule of the Historical Context** and the **Rule of Grammar**. The last in importance! It helps us, in the correct interpretation of the Scriptures, to know the historical background in which the incident is presented in the biblical passage. And the same Bible uses grammar to interpret itself. I will give you an example: Galatians 3:16-- the apostle appeals to the grammatical number of the word in Genesis 22:18.

Let's return to Matthew 18:20. How does the grammar help us to understand this better? You promised to comment on it.

In the passage in Matthew 18:15-20, there are different persons gathered. But the congregation of v. 20 is different from the previous ones in the sense that the verb, "gathered" there is in the passive voice. In the others, the persons that are gathered act in the action of the verb (Active voice, or middle). In this, "Another" gathers in the midst of them, and there is the assembly. The "2 or 3" isn't a literal number, but it is representative of the testimony ("in the mouth of 2 or 3 witnesses, every word is upheld"?). So that there is the truth, developed in the Acts and in the Epistles, of a local assembly gathered by the Holy Spirit in His Name, and to the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Discipline in God's School, pt. 1

Joel Portman

One of the greatest difficulties in a believer's life is the experience of suffering trials and times of affliction,

especially when it is difficult to understand a reason why. Sometimes the reason may be obvious to an exercised soul, but there are also times when reasons are obscure and one finds it difficult to discern the purpose for the experience. Then the question comes to one's heart, "Why is this happening to me?" especially when the Christian has been seeking to live for the Lord with spiritual exercise and faithfulness. Such questions are not uncommon and are certainly not wrong if asked in the spirit of seeking to understand God's purpose in our lives. Job certainly didn't understand the reasons why, contrary to his understanding of the experience of the just, he was suffering all that he experienced.

It is beneficial for us to remember that when we were saved, we entered a pathway of education, a course of study that is based, not only on what we know through study, but much more upon what we learn through experiences. Life's experiences are not a haphazard series of occurrences that have no purpose! As in any course of education, there is a carefully designed pathway of developmental experiences through which learning is reinforced and tested by trials to determine and develop our lives according to the design of the Master. There are many great and practical spiritual truths we begin to understand, or we may even boast that we know from personal study of the Scriptures, but we do not actually know them until we have experienced the reality of having tested and proven them in our daily lives.

Our Bible is filled with examples of those who God tested according to their personal stage of spiritual development so that they might produce more fruitfulness for God, more correspondence to His will and purpose. We remember that the Lord told His disciples in John 15:2 that the purging experience the vine undergoes is not purposed to hinder fruitbearing, but to enable the vine to produce more fruit. This is the lesson we learn from the lives of every man or woman of faith who began in this school and continued to progress through the lessons learned at the hand of God. Actually, Hebrews 11 is a record of the schooling and performance of those individuals to whom God is calling our attention so that we might profit from their experiences and follow the same pattern. Our day and need is no different, so we will profit to recognize that we are also in a school of discipline, not always easy (Hebrews 12:11), but always profitable and for the glory of God.

Meaning and Forms of Discipline

Every believer experiences discipline in some form in his life. It is a proof of the fatherly care of God for His children (Hebrews 12:8). The ones addressed in this passage had endured much affliction expressed in manifold forms. They needed to be encouraged to remember the exhortation of Proverbs 3:11-12 and to realize that those experiences proved the reality of their new relationship with God. So do

we in our lives! Discipline certainly doesn't mean God is displeased with His children. Neither is discipline always in the form of suffering. The word used in Hebrews 12:5 is a word that includes every activity involved in the training of children. It includes all the varied ways through which God works in our lives including instruction, counsel, exhortation, warning, discipline, correction and chastening. This may be experienced through:

1. Control and correction by those set over us, beginning in the home with our parents, and continuing, to include the elders God has raised in local assemblies. It may also include others in positions of authority over us. Resentment of proper authority indicates a wrong spiritual state and will also prevent spiritual development in a believer who refuses it. We read concerning Christ that "he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them," (Luke 2:51). Since that was true of Him, it should also be seen in His people.

2. Circumstances of life including various adversities or trials. These may be in the form of a difficult employer or another person with whom we work or live. It may be the loss of health involving sickness, such as has been the experience of many genuine men of God. For example, when W. R. Lewis, a very godly man who served the Lord with "Echoes of Service" missionary magazine, was 23 years old, he experienced a hemorrhage in a lung and then later another one, so that he spent his life after the age of 30 mostly confined to his bed. However, from that bed and in a weakened state, he continued his normal work along with his service to the Lord and the assembly.

3. Antagonism and reproach related to Christ because of testimony, such as opposition from others, loss of advances in career or employment, or physical imprisonment (experienced, for example, by G. Bull in Tibet during the beginning of the Chinese Communist occupation of that country and that such as is experienced by many believers in some parts of the world today).

4. Loss of material possessions, physical necessities, or employment. Some of God's people have unexpectedly experienced the loss of house and property through disaster, or have suffered the loss of their job. This can be a means God uses to draw them into closer dependence on Him and appreciation of those things that are spiritual and eternal which can never be lost.

5. Accidents, as we term it, or unexpected happenings in our lives. There is really no "accident" in the lives of God's people. There are many methods, (and many more than are listed above) and God uses what is needed to develop His purposes and to produce the character He desires to see in each one of His children.

It may startle us to realize that God is far more interested in our spiritual state and development than in our physical well-being or welfare in this world. We often place our priorities on the latter, when God is emphasizing that,

at all costs, His desire is to see us progress spiritually. In order to accomplish this goal, He may touch every physical aspect of our lives.

(To be continued)

Holy Results of Heavenly Blessing: The Christian Home

H. C. G. Moule on Eph. 5: 22 – Eph. 6: 4

Here is a subject as pregnant and far-reaching as it is in itself beautiful—the Christian Home. It is not too much to say that the perfecting of Home is the masterpiece of the Gospel, in its work of social blessing. Nothing on earth is so beautiful as a perfect home; and it takes the Name of Christ and the grace of His Spirit to produce the full phenomenon. And then, where the home is really perfect, it is beautiful with a beauty which must diffuse itself in good around. For home is the school of mutual unselfishness and duty, where love is continually learning its true work, namely, the finding its happiness in the felicity of another. And such a school cannot but send its scholars forth, in one way or another, to practice the blessed art outside the doors; carrying on the campaign of love extended from that happy base. The home where the Lord reigns is “a watered garden,” fresh, fragrant, and in order. It is also “a spring of water, whose waters fail not,” making glad the region around it (Jeremiah 31: 12), which needs so sorely the gracious stream.

It is with the deepest reason then that the closing paragraphs of an Epistle like this are devoted in so large a measure to domestic life. At the first glance there is a surprise about it, a sort of anticlimax. The Epistle, as we certainly do not need at this stage to prove, is concerned, in an almost unique degree among the Epistles, first with the most transcendent aspects of Redemption, as it is seen to be the eternal purpose of the Infinite Mind, and then with its largest and most comprehensive sphere of realization, in a Church which is “the fulness of Him who filleth all in all.” The first three chapters are exclusively devoted to such great aspects of the faith and of the life of Christians. What shall be the climax of such a message? Shall it not be that unfathomable future where “God shall be all in all”? Shall we not be directed towards the light of eternal fulfillments, and in it see everything absorbed, as it were, and blended into the one prospect of the final state, almost losing, in the vision of the glory of the Throne, all distinct sight even of the multitude that loves, worships, and serves around it? Instead of such sublime exaltations of prospect, we have here as a fact just the persons and relations of a little circle within the doors and walls of an Asian dwelling-place. Even

the city around it, Ephesus, Smyrna, Hierapolis, is left unmentioned, almost unthought of. The home is for the moment everything; as much as if the whole earth had for its population just one domestic group, and all human duty and all human hope were lodged there, and there alone.

Yet this paradox is the truest issue of the glorious antecedent passages. For this home circle is the genuine and abiding unit of human society. And the Gospel, in all its depth and wonder, as well as in its simplicity and tenderness, brings to man a salvation whose blessings can only be fully realized in social human life. So the glorious rays of the eternal Purpose, and the achieved Redemption, and the Sealing by the Spirit, and the Life of the Head in the Body, are all focused from above upon this one spot, that we may see them in their fruits just where those fruits shall best be generated and developed, for the delight of God and man. If we see the process in its lovely efficacy *there*, we have the true pledge that it can yet be efficacious everywhere, in all the true relations of human existence upon earth, in which man is training for his final and endless life in “the Father's House,” which is also “the Holy City.”

This aspect of the matter will be brought before us in a way as tender as it is sublime, in the paragraph we are about to translate. The immediate subject is the married state, man and wife in their Christian relation, in a human home as unfigurative as possible; in Ephesus, in London. But so is the transcendent truth of the Heavenly Wedlock woven into the whole texture of the passage that the expositor turns to these sentences almost as much for his doctrine of the relation of the Church to Christ as for his account of how husband should think of wife and wife of husband in a mortal home. And why? Not by any accident or arbitrary juxtaposition of subjects, but by a holy law of truth and thought. How *are* those conjugal partners to think of one another in their home-life, day by day? With all possible practicality of considerateness, with all cordial devotion of human affection, with a recollected attention to one another which will regulate their intercourse of word and conduct far more minutely than the longest code of rules could do. Most true; but that is not the whole of the matter. This attention, affection, watchful consideration, this mutual loyalty and love, is to be perfectly human; but also, if it is as it should be for *Christians*, it is to be inspired by what is perfectly divine. The two persons are genuine man and woman, in an entirely human home-life; no pagan pair can be more so. But their entire humanity is entirely joined to the Lord their Head, in that mighty union which His Body, the true Church, has with Him, and which every member of it has with Him, and through Him with all the others. They are each, and both, in Christ. They can never therefore think quite truly or fully of one another apart from that wonderful position and condition. So the illustration—backward and forward—of their married state by the Heavenly Wedlock, and of the Heavenly Wedlock by their married state, is not

an accidental thing; it is of the essence of the facts. The life of holy matrimony, and so the life of the home which is its outcome, is raised to its ideal, to its truth, not only by general religious considerations but by the profound and special relation to it of that very mystery of the Eternal Purpose of which the earlier passages of the Epistle were so full, the relation of the glorified Lord to the Company of His Saints.

Pregnant indeed is the passage, thus regarded. And never more than in our time did its sacred lessons touch the very point. Home, that word so dear for long generations to our English race, is still, God be praised, a mighty factor in our modern life. But, like everything else established among men, it is assailed, and from many sides, and not without visible dangers and losses. The stress and also the manifold dissipations of life in our day, when artificial conditions affect more and more what we do, are both alike unfavorable to the full strength and life of the home. Too often parents are too hurried to be parental, and even children are too hurried to be filial. Sometimes it is the labor of actual toil, in handicraft or profession, sometimes the labor of over-wrought school-competition, hardening and hurrying the young existence, to its lasting loss; sometimes it is the toil and service of what is known as pleasure. By one means or another innumerable homes are not what their predecessors were; the world's loud and open life has thrust the door ajar, and stands inside it, before the time. What is the best antidote, the true succor, for the true preservation or restoration of this inestimable thing, God's own primeval gift, man's Home? It is the recollection and use of the glorious Christian principle of its life. It is the old, eternal story of the Lord Jesus Christ's relation to home. We Christian parents must solemnly remember again before God that our union is the holy counterpart to the Heavenly Wedlock, which is to govern its action and experience every day. Then we shall be the better able, by word and very far more by life, life lived in the keen sight of our sons and daughters, to hold home in a true unity together, till it is diffused to reproduce itself in other homes, knit together by the same invisible but mighty bond.

As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

Joshua 24:15

The Christian Husband and the Christian Wife stand now before us; two noble portraits, making one. We contemplate them again, one in their absolute mutual loyalty and love, one, in a sense as deep and sacred as it is warm with affections created by Him who is Love itself, holy and everlasting. We see them "devoted" to each other, each in the respective conjugal position. We see that heart "devotion" at once chastened, deepened, and profoundly secured by the thought all around it of the duties in whose line it moves and glows; a thought to which every true heart that

knows the interior life of Christian wedlock will respond with joy. Above all, we see them walking along their one path, "one soul in two bodies," as those who see upon that path, at every step, in all its relations, its duties, its sorrows and its joys, a glory shed from the "great mystery" of the Heavenly Wedlock which has joined them each to the Eternal Bridegroom. Yes, upon their common domestic duties, the affairs of the household in its most prosaic aspect, a radiance falls, elevating, purifying, gladdening, hallowing, from very far aloft, even from where there shines

"A light upon the shining sea,
The Bridegroom with His Bride."

It is good for the soul to gaze upon this portrait; it is good for the whole human heart. For it all illustrates the power of the spiritual Gospel to act with full benignant force upon the social life of man. It has sometimes been thrown as a reproach upon the advocates or ambassadors of that Gospel that they have occupied themselves too much with the message of personal salvation and too little, or not at all, with the salvation (so to speak) of society. Let them not be afraid of that reproach if it only means that they have firmly refused to forget that their first and vital message is to the fallen and sinful soul of man; "Be reconciled to God." They do well to resolve never to let this be exchanged for any programs and enterprises of social reform and amendment which at all ignore man's sin and scarcely contemplate his immortality as a practical prospect in the matter. But let them take good heed to the criticism if it means that they have not diligently drawn social inferences out of personal salvation, perpetually reminding those who have believed that they are "saved to serve," and that out of that fact flows a whole life of social usefulness as the Redeemer's will for His redeemed. Let them resolve, if need be, that if they have neglected this vast side of their work they will do so no more. And, if they would go the right way to work, let them, in a sense most particular and definite, "begin at Home." Make the Christian feel that the inmost and most heavenly truths of his wonderful personal salvation bear direct and full upon his life at home, upon his married character and conduct, and you will have taken a long step towards the leavening of all social relations, so far as that individual can in the least touch them, with the power of Christ.

As we pass on, let us note in this portrait of a Christian married pair what may escape our notice as a distinctive trait. I mean, the simple injunction to the man to love his wife. Few of us, perhaps, realize how remote—at least how separable—from the pagan idea of marriage was the idea of love. There would be love of brother and sister, of parent and child; there would be the passion of lovers, alas how often quite apart from the restraints of the law of virtue. But marriage was essentially a matter of arrangement, contract, convention. It was a necessity of human society. It was the required antecedent to the succession of

generations and the devolution of property. But it was not at all understood to involve love, before its consummation, or after, as a thing essential. In Hebrew life it is far otherwise; who does not remember Jacob and Rachel? And who has not observed that the teaching of the Old Testament leads directly up to the truth of the Heavenly Wedlock of Christ and His Church, by the long stream of appeal and prophecy about the Marriage of the Lord and His Israel, full of the thought of an eternal conjugal affection? But it needed the consummated revelation, the full truth, as it shines out in this Epistle, to bring home to a universal Christendom not only the mystical truth of the supreme Bridal, but also the hallowed and hallowing affections and tender duties of the married life of man and woman, here and now.

But the Apostle has much yet to say about home. Necessarily, he has spoken first of its heads and leaders, because the whole tone of the circle, children and household, must so vitally depend upon what they are, each in his and her personal life, and both together in their life mutual and one. Nothing but a miracle of abnormal grace can make the home-company happy and holy when the Parents are not *towards one another* living the full Christian life. So not till that has been depicted does he say one word about children.

“Principalities and powers,
Mustering their unseen array,
Wait for thy unguarded hours;
Watch and pray!”

—Miss C. Elliott

We have now seen the interior of Christian home-life, as it was lived in the first century, and as it is lived (with differences, in regard of the last of its relations, due only to its own pure principles working themselves out) in the nineteenth. Such homes, such households, God be thanked, are scattered over our own dear Land in numberless points of brightness, radiating good around them. They are to be found in every Gospel-lighted region of Europe, in the Western World, in the young countries of the Southern Ocean. They begin to mark with spots of beauty the darkness of the non-Christian peoples; there is many a home now, true to the Ephesian model, in the cities and villages of China, in all the provinces of India, by the rivers and the lakes of what was lately unknown Africa, and in the islets of the Pacific. And every one of them is a precious contribution to the true evangelization of the world, and also, all the while, to its true temporal happiness and order.

“Home, sweet Home!” It is the “garden enclosed” of the Gospel; its nursery, from which blessing is planted out, even into the utmost wilderness of mankind.

I cannot forbear here the quotation of a poem, well known in Germany, where the true Home is set before us in lines which are a fit sequel to the Apostle’s precepts. It is Spitta’s hymn, “The Christian Household.”

Oh, happy house! where Thou art lov’d the best,
Dear Friend and Saviour of our race,
Where never comes such welcom’d, honour’d Guest,
Where none can ever fill Thy place;
Where every heart goes forth to meet Thee,
Where every ear attends Thy word,
Where every lip with blessing greets Thee,
Where all are waiting on their Lord.

Oh, happy house! where two are one in heart,
In holy faith and hope are one,
Whom death can only for a little part,
Not end the union here begun;
Who share together one salvation,
Who would be with Thee, Lord, always,
In gladness, or in tribulation,
In happy or in evil days.

Oh, happy house! where little ones are given
Early to Thee, in faith and prayer,—
To Thee, their Friend, who from the heights of heaven
Guard’st them with more than mother’s care.
Oh, happy house! where little voices
Their glad hosannas love to raise,
And childhood’s lisping tongue rejoices
To bring new songs of love and praise.

Oh, happy house! and happy servitude!
Where all alike one Master own;
Where daily duty, in Thy strength pursued,
Is never hard nor toilsome known;
Where each one serves Thee, meek and lowly,
Whatever Thine appointment be,
Till common tasks seem great and holy,
When they are done as unto Thee.

Oh, happy house! where Thou are not forgot
When joy is flowing full and free;
Oh, happy house! where every wound is brought,
Physician, Comforter, to Thee;
Until, at last, earth’s day’s-work ended,
All meet Thee in that home above,
From whence Thou earnest, where Thou art ascended,
The heaven of glory and of love!

May all who read this be encouraged to be exercised before the Lord to bring His Lordship into your marriage relationship, your home, and your household. May the Lord give great help and courage to us, in these days of darkness and departure, to strongly construct and vigilantly maintain the sanctity and holiness of a home that is built in Him and for Him.

...The Lord shall bless thee... Psalm 127 and 128.

"I seem to know more of the Lord Jesus Christ than of the most intimate friend I have on earth."

Robert M. M'Cheyne