

Articles

	Page
God's Government	1
Deuteronomy, pt. 1	3
Doctrines of Election Misplaced	5
Features of a N. T. Assembly	7
The Character of Worship	9
Excerpts from Intro to Second Peter	10

God's Government

Leviticus 26
Gaius Goff

To maintain a society that functions peacefully and in an orderly manner, producing the best possible effect on its citizens, we need the controlling power of authority. God designates this in the scriptures by appointing the husband to be responsible for his wife and children at home, elders to be accountable for the proper functioning of an assembly, and the "powers that be" as "ministers of righteousness" for a nation. He intended to fill all of those roles concerning the children of Israel. If the people obeyed Him, they would experience the blessings of abundance in material things. They wouldn't have to fear their enemies because the Lord would deal with them in His way. They could live and walk uprightly as free men with their heads held high and their hearts content. God's presence would be gladly enjoyed among them.

God, in His grace, has freed us from the bondage of sin solely through His grace, even though we don't deserve any of His mercy. His power has given us the Holy Spirit to help us rise above the challenges of the world, the flesh, and the devil. There is no need to live defeated lives when faced with temptations and enemies around us. The patterns of life we had when in our sins have been broken by divine power. But we only experience this when we are obedient to God's revealed will and committed to walking in the ways He has shown us in His Word. When we do so, God's protection surrounds us. His "strength is made perfect in weakness." Our spiritual prosperity is based on our obedience to our gracious Father.

Obedience to the Covenant: Leviticus 26:3-13

The arrangement related to the covenant God made with the children of Israel at Mt. Sinai was based on an "if-then" agreement. God stated what He would do and could be relied upon to fulfill His part of the covenant completely. God cannot fail, nor will He ever be unfaithful to His people. The Israelites knew God to be righteous, holy, and full of grace, mercy, and love. His word is true,

and it is impossible for God to lie. The three blessings outlined in the covenant when the Israelites were obedient to the Lord included, God providing the necessary rain to ensure abundant harvests. Each crop would be so plentiful that as soon as they finished gathering one type of produce, the next would be ready to harvest. The second blessing was that they would live in peace, where neither wild animals nor human enemies would succeed against them. The third blessing was that God would be with them. His presence would be there, watching over their well-being. There would be a constant close relationship between the Lord and His people.

Disobedience to the Covenant: Leviticus 26:14-39

Israel was not obedient as a nation for very long. Some of the early generations experienced the peace God had promised. But divine government should never be taken for granted. God clearly warned them about the consequences of disobedience and doing things their way. First, there would be fear, sickness, poor harvests, and enemies attacking. Second, there would be no rain, resulting in a lack of crops for food. Third, the land would be plagued with wild animals attacking their children and domestic animals. After that, there would be a series of curses that increased "seven times." Their enemies would invade their land. The rural villages would be emptied, and the cities besieged. Epidemics would claim many lives, and famine would cause such severe food shortages that cannibalism would occur among the people. Enemies would not only invade the country but also defeat them and take them captive, and those who survived would be exiled. Principles related to righteous living and justice are not open to debate about whether they should be changed. There are always consequences for sin. God's purpose in causing or permitting tragedies may serve various reasons. In Israel, it is still possible today, one reason was due to their disobedience and reluctance to do what they knew was right.

Sometimes, tragedy befalls us because of someone else's wrongdoing. Innocent people often suffer because of others' neglect or choices. Unfit parenting has hurt many children. People have been injured or killed because of careless or drunk drivers. Peacekeepers have been attacked by those who are completely self-centered. Natural disasters have also caused severe damage to property, life, and health. We may not, and often cannot, understand, for the moment, why things happen. But we should take ourselves seriously and consider whether we are obeying or disobeying God's will. Calamity is not always the result

of wrongdoing, but it is a good time for serious spiritual reflection.

In the case of the nation of Israel, God took action to bring about repentance and restoration. The purpose of punishment is to change behavior when properly accepted. Chastening "yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." God had clearly defined the way of life He expected from His people. There was never a question about His mercy and longsuffering toward those He loved and who were His people. His desire for them was very clearly stated. The consequences were easy to understand. His love was demonstrated by giving them many opportunities to repent.

Even when they fell under His chastening hand of judgment, it was an act of revealed love. Many times, it led to repentance but not lasting change. That is why the years of captivity were like "years the locusts have eaten." They spent years in captivity and, even now, are

not what God intended for their purpose and well-being when He chose them. That future will come because God does have a plan for Israel. Misplaced guilt should not be part of God's people's lives today. Searching for a reason for punishment behind every difficulty that arises is not a proper way to understand God's will. Trying to find someone to blame when disasters happen or trouble comes to others is not our right. However, viewing everything that happens to us as merely an accident of nature or something we must endure is also incorrect.

Take time to meditate on God's Word and seek to understand the events in your life as God's way of training you to be effective in His service. If we think our Lord is not aware of our attitudes and actions, He can change that very quickly. "For this cause, many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep." He wants us to be His representatives among the people and places where we find ourselves. May we never forget the laws, judgments, and principles we live by as believers, and may we influence others, so they know the One we belong to says of Himself, "I am the Lord."

These are not just opinions; they are promises from God. None are careless decisions of men; they are in His written Word. It is vital that we listen to and heed God's words. Then, when we act according to His will, it may influence people's lives and possibly the nation's. It did so in the times of giving the covenant and continues to do so for many. God's judgments are straightforward and always just. The principles for living a meaningful life are universal and applicable to everyone, everywhere. He knows what is best for us; these principles have been in place from the beginning.

Blessings come from genuine obedience, and severe adverse consequences result from willful sin. Deliberately going our own way, even after being taught what is right, will not only bring bad results but is also an abomination in God's sight. Consequences for right or wrong occur as consistently as night follows day. The wise person will submit to God's authority and discover that He remains the same in blessing today as He was in the past. It is impossible not to lose if one ignores God's laws. For every disobedient action we choose to take, pause to consider the cause of just judgment. When difficulties arise or tragedy strikes unexpectedly, it may be God's way of speaking to us when His will is rejected. Not everything that happens to us is caused by unresolved guilt or actions left undone. Some lessons are only learned after experiencing pain. It may be an act of divine grace when God allows hardship to come, as it might be the very thing that keeps us from falling under sin's powerful grip.

"I Will...If.": Leviticus 26:40-46

This covenant document is like a prophetic history of the promised land, spanning from the past to the future. God promises directly—"I will... I will"—24 times. He

"Truths for our Day"

A monthly publication that is freely available on the Internet and is intended to help believers who appreciate the timeless truths of God's Word and who recognize the unchanging principles of God's will for His people. It is primarily intended to strengthen those who enjoy fellowship in local assemblies of believers who are gathered to the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

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gave them the land to occupy and told them blessings would come “If” they fulfilled their part of the covenant. A response was necessary and expected because blessings have a foundation. Obedience is a reasonable expectation; it is a basic, fundamental response to an agreement to receive God’s “I will.”

The covenant God made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob takes precedence over the covenant at Mt. Sinai because its impact is global. God’s grace, mercy, love, and redemption lead Him to remember the ancient covenant, and He has blessed the world through the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. A barometer of Israel’s blessing was whether Israel obeyed the Magna Carta of the land. Rainfall, bountiful crops, and sunshine in the right amounts would come from God’s gracious hand when they obeyed His holy will. If we have over us an umbrella of indifference, sin, and stepping out of God’s will, that will leave us without the blessings of obedience, and all that could have been good is lost, even though God says, “I will.”

The difference between good and bad boils down to a single word and an act from me – “If.” The “ifs” of my life significantly influence the outcome. A nation lives or dies by its choices. I live or die depending on my choice of “ifs.” I dare not blame others’ choices or failings because I am called to think, consider, and respond to what I do when God says, “I will.”

If Israel had obeyed, there would have been peace in the land; however, they did not. If people do not listen to God and His word and refuse to do what He has a right to expect, if the covenants made are broken, rejected, despised, or ignored, if I walk contrary to the way the Lord has shown me – I will walk alone with no light to guide me. I do not want that; I want God’s “I will” of blessing. I hope I truly understand the meaning of the words, “not my will but Thine be done.” I genuinely want the will of God in every part of my life – personally, in my family, in my marriage, in my church, and in my service. For God’s “I will” of blessing, I pray – and I choose what my Lord desires.

Deuteronomy, pt 1

God’s Handbook for Saints

Joel Portman

Many believers appreciate the truths of this fifth book of the Pentateuch and its application to our day. Adam Clarke said of Deuteronomy, “The Book of Deuteronomy and the Epistle to the Hebrews contain the best comment on the nature, design and use of the law; the former may be considered as an evangelical commentary on the four preceding books, in which the spiritual reference and signification of the different parts of the law are given, and given in such a manner as none could give who had not a clear discov-

ery of the glory which was to be revealed. It may be safely asserted that very few parts of the Old Testament Scriptures can be read with greater profit by the genuine Christian than the Book of Deuteronomy.” To this could be added many other comments by discerning students of Scripture.

Deuteronomy gives to the people of God the teaching that would regulate their conduct and cause their enjoyment of the land into which they were soon to enter. It anticipates the outpouring of God’s blessing on them but also looks for expected conditions on their part to continue in the enjoyment of God’s intended blessings. It tells us the conditions of the covenant under which the people would function and through which God would express His loving heart toward them.

Obedience Emphasized

For this reason, Deuteronomy is a Divine Treatise on Obedience. God required their obedience under law and we see similar principles toward us under grace. That is to say, that though God has brought each believer into a position of blessing under Christ, the enjoyment of that blessing and the fullness of his position can really only be known as he seeks to walk in subjection to Divine principles and precepts that God expects. We are not under law, but we are not without guidance as to what God desires to see in each one of us. Deuteronomy teaches us that God’s Word and its truths are for the blessing and benefit of each of His own, yea even farther, of all mankind. Disobedience has always brought ruin and sorrow to the lives of men whether saved or not.

Order of the Pentateuch

The books of our Pentateuch are linked together to typically record God’s delivering work toward the believer, the standing of a believer as a result of that work, and the spiritual progress of the child of God. Genesis, the book of beginnings, tells us of Man going out under God’s judgment on his sin, yet in that same book we also find principles that regulate and are displayed in the worthy ones who walk by faith before their God. In Exodus, we find God’s answer to man’s fall in Redemption by applied blood and power, and we learn of how man can be brought out of sin’s bondage and condemnation through the blood. Leviticus shows us the way into the presence of God and takes up the Redeemed of the Lord, showing them as Priests in the sanctuary with ability to function in God’s presence. Numbers teaches us that though linked with the heavenly sanctuary, we are also moving on through the wilderness of experience under the cloud of God’s presence, being led by Himself. But Deuteronomy contemplates the child of God going on and up in relation to Divine purposes, and shows us God’s principles for the preservation of God’s people and their enjoyment of Divine blessings that are spiritually ours in Christ. It does not

show us their position in the land, but it anticipates their going in, and God again gives those principles that would preserve them to that inheritance and preserve that inheritance to them.

Second Law

The name, Deuteronomy, has been said to mean “the Second Law,” an expression that we understand is derived from the Latin translation of the title of the book in the Septuagint. This is undoubtedly a characteristic of the book, for in it God repeats those principles and precepts that had been given earlier in their experience, but now it is to the second generation of travelers. It shows us that there is a need for repetition of old truths to younger generations so that those truths might not be lost but preserved for the blessing of each one. Paul surely had this in mind when he told Timothy to commit those things heard of him to faithful men who would also teach others. (II Timothy 2:2) We need not fear repetition of simple, yet vital truths for God’s people and should not always be searching out things that are new or novel to teach. The principle God has given us is that the old truths are proven to be of maximum benefit for His people. So just prior to entering the land, Moses, the great law-giver, repeats those precious things he had heard of God in the mount.

Reasons for Repetition

We find there were at least three reasons Moses had in repeating the law. One was so that they might live (4:1, 5:33, 8:1, 16:20, 30:6, 16). This indicates that the very life of the people would be sustained and upheld by obedience to these truths. And we find that in our day, even under grace, the life of a child of God must be nourished by God’s Word and will only be developed by adherence to those precious truths. God expects and desires that His people might live, thrive and display all the evidences of Divine life that has been produced by the Holy Spirit. We find that He told them, “For it [is] not a vain thing for you; because it is your life:” Deut. 32:47. God anticipates that His Word obeyed and heeded in practice will sustain and bring needed strength to uphold the life that is within each believer. Do we understand and appreciate the vital importance God’s Word has in the spiritual life that He has given us? One observes many cases in which spiritual life and the appreciation of Divine truths are hindered by occupation with too many things that are contrary to Biblical principles.

Then we find that God’s purpose for them is “that ye may rejoice,” (12:7, 12:18; 14:26; 16:11, 14, 15; 26:11; 27:7) so that such a life of obedience to His blessed commands will always result in fullness of joy. We think of the Psalmist, especially in Psalm 119, who expressed his sincere delight in the commands and precepts of His God and rejoiced in their goodness to him. Again in Psalm 1, that blessed man (perfectly exemplified in our Lord Jesus Christ) had his “delight in

the law of His God..” This indicates that the Lord’s purpose through His Word is that the Christian might display a joyfulness that comes from an inward contentment with all that God’s Word ministers to him. Again we might well ask ourselves if His precious Word is the delight of our hearts and do we express that joy that comes from a contentment in the things of God. If we are getting our source of joy from the world, then we will have little appetite for the things of heaven.

Again we learn that God gave this law again to them so that they might “go in and possess (or inherit) the land,” (4:1, 8:1, 11:8, 16:20). It is evidently His anticipation that they will be fit in life and ability to overcome every enemy obstacle that was before them so that they might take full control of that land of rich blessing and enjoy it fully. While the land, with all its spiritual inheritance is ours in Christ, we find that the enjoyment of it lies in our exercise to carry out the truths of God’s Word and to display our desires in life for Him in this way. In Ephesians, the book of Divine inheritance, we learn that the believer must “walk worthy of the vocation (calling) wherewith he has been called,” (Ephesians 4:1) and such walking is the characteristic that displays obedience to Divine principles and teaching of God’s Word, resulting in the ability to stand fast and overcome the enemy who seeks to hinder (6:10-17).

Moses, a Faithful Man

It is precious to observe that despite his failures, Moses was honored of God in his life and in his death. Both Moses and Aaron died in the wilderness, both through their own failures, but both died on a mountain top. One can conclude that God was indicating His approval of the overall tenor and character of their lives and would not suffer them to be dishonored even in death. Deuteronomy begins by telling us that these are the words Moses spoke in the wilderness, words about God and His truth, and it ends with words God spoke about Moses concerning his life and character, (34:10). God spoke highly of His prophet after his death as well as during his life (Numbers 12:6-8), but in Deuteronomy 18:15, 18, Moses spoke prophetically of the Lord as the far greater Prophet who would come. Israel had failed to hearken to Moses as they should have, but they would ultimately hearken to the greater Prophet who would and will bring them into far greater blessing than Moses ever could. Even with failures (the best of men are only failures at their best), God shows His appreciation of a man such as Moses who “is faithful in all mine house.” Does this not teach us that men such as Moses who seek to uphold and teach the Word of God are worthy of honor and God will honor them, even though there may be some failure and will be in any one of us? May God help us in our day to have more like Moses who had a heart for the preservation and blessing of God’s people and an eye to approval from God only!

Doctrine of Election Misplaced

C H Mackintosh.

"Thou shalt not remove thy neighbour's landmark, which they of old have set in thine inheritance" (Deut. 19: 14). "Take up the stumbling-block out of the way of My people" (Isa. 57: 14).

What tender care, what gracious considerateness, breathe in the above passages! The ancient landmarks were not to be removed; but the stumbling-blocks were to be taken up. The inheritance of God's people was to stand entire and unchanged, while the stumbling-blocks were to be sedulously removed out of their pathway. Such was the grace and care of God for His people! The portion which God had given to each was to be enjoyed, while, at the same time, the path in which each was called to walk should be kept free from every occasion of stumbling.

Now, judging from recent communications, we believe we are called upon to give attention to the spirit of those ancient enactments. Some of our friends have, in their letters to us, opened the minds very freely as to their spiritual condition. They have told us of their doubts and fears, their difficulties and dangers, their conflicts and exercises. We are truly grateful for such confidence; and it is our earnest desire to be used of God to help our readers by pointing out the landmarks which He, by His Spirit, has set up, and thus remove the stumbling-blocks which the enemy diligently flings in their path.

In pondering the cases which have lately been submitted to us, we have found some in which the enemy was manifestly using as a stumbling-block the doctrine of election misplaced. The doctrine of election, in its right place, instead of being a stumbling-block in the pathway of anxious inquirers, will be found to be a landmark set by them of old time, even by the inspired apostles of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, in the inheritance of God's spiritual Israel.

But we all know that misplaced truth is more dangerous than positive error. If a man were to stand up, and boldly declare that the doctrine of election is false, we should without hesitation reject his words; but we might not be quite so well prepared to meet one who, while admitting the doctrine to be true and important, puts it out of its divinely appointed place. This latter is the very thing which is so constantly done, to the damaging of the truth of God, and the darkening of the souls of men.

What, then, is the true place of the doctrine of election? Its true, its divinely appointed place, is for those within the house—for the establishment of true believers. Instead of this, the enemy puts it outside the house, for the stumbling of anxious inquirers. Harken to the following language of a deeply exercised soul: "If I only knew that I was one of the elect I should be quite

happy, inasmuch as I could then confidently apply to myself the benefits of the death of Christ."

Doubtless, this would be the language of many, were they only to tell out the feelings of their hearts. They are making a wrong use of the doctrine of election—a doctrine blessedly true in itself—a most valuable "landmark," but made a "stumbling-block" by the enemy. It is very needful for the anxious inquirer to bear in mind that it is as a lost sinner, and not as "one of the elect," that he can apply to himself the benefits of the death of Christ.

The proper stand-point from which to get a saving view of the death of Christ is not election, but the consciousness of our ruin. This is an unspeakable mercy, inasmuch as I know I am a lost sinner; but I do not know that I am one of the elect, until I have received, through the Spirit's testimony and teaching, the glad tidings of salvation through the blood of the Lamb. Salvation—free as the sunbeams, full as the ocean, permanent as the throne of the eternal God—is preached to me, not as one of the elect, but as one utterly lost, guilty, and undone; and when I have received this salvation there is conclusive evidence of my election.

"Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God; for our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance" (1 Thess. 1: 4-5). Election is not my warrant for accepting salvation; but the reception of salvation is the proof of election. For how is any sinner to know that he is one of the elect? Where is he to find it? It must be a matter of divine revelation, else it cannot be a matter of faith. But where is it revealed? Where is the knowledge of election made an indispensable prerequisite, an essential preliminary, to the acceptance of salvation? Nowhere, in the Word of God. My only title to salvation is, that I am a poor guilty, hell-deserving sinner. If I wait for any other title, I am only removing a most valuable landmark from its proper place, and putting it as a stumbling-block in my way. This, to say the least of it, is very unwise.

But it is more than unwise. It is positive opposition to the Word of God; not only to the quotations which stand at the head of this paper, but to the spirit and teaching of the entire volume. Harken to the risen Saviour's commission to His first heralds: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16: 15). Is there so much as a single point, in these words, on which to base a question about election? Is any one, to whom this glorious gospel is preached, called to settle a prior question about his election? Assuredly not.

"All the world" and "every creature" are expressions which set aside every difficulty, and render salvation as free as the air, and as wide as the human family. It is not said, "Go ye into a given section of the world, and preach the gospel to a certain number." No; this would not be in keeping with that grace which was to be

proclaimed to the wide, wide world. When the law was in question, it was addressed to a certain number, in a given section; but when the gospel was to be proclaimed, its mighty range was to be, "All the world," and its object, "Every creature."

Again, hear what the Holy Ghost saith, by the apostle Paul: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Tim. 1: 15). Is there any room here for raising a question as to one's title to salvation? None whatever. If Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, and if I am a sinner, then I am entitled to apply to my own soul the benefits of His precious sacrifice. Ere I can possibly exclude myself therefrom I must be something else than a sinner. If it were anywhere declared in Scripture that Christ Jesus came to save only the elect, then clearly I should, in some way or another, prove myself one of that number, ere I could make my own the benefits of His death. But, thanks be to God, there is nothing the least like this in the whole gospel scheme.

"The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19: 10). And is not that just what I am? Truly so. Well then, is it not from the standpoint of a lost one that I am to look at the death of Christ? Doubtless. And can I not, while contemplating that precious mystery from thence, adopt the language of faith, and say, "He loved me, and gave Himself for me"? Yes, as unreservedly and unconditionally as though I were the only sinner on the surface of the globe.

Nothing can be more soothing and tranquilizing to the spirit of an anxious inquirer than to mark the way in which salvation is brought to him in the very condition in which he is, and on the very ground which he occupies. There is not so much as a single stumbling-block along the entire path leading to the glorious inheritance of the saints—an inheritance settled by landmarks which neither men nor devils can ever remove.

The God of all grace has left nothing undone, nothing unsaid, which could possibly give rest, assurance, and perfect satisfaction to the soul. He has set forth the very condition and character of those for whom Christ died, in such terms as to leave no room for any demur or hesitation. Listen to the following glowing words: "For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." "But God commendeth His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son" (Rom. 5: 6, 8, 10).

Can anything be plainer or more pointed than these passages? Is there a single term made use of which could possibly raise a question in the heart of any sinner as to his full and undisputed title to the benefits of the death of Christ? Not one. Am I "ungodly"? It was for such Christ died. Am I "a sinner"? It is to such

that God commendeth His love. Am I "an enemy"? It is such God reconciles by the death of His Son. Thus all is made as plain as a sunbeam; and as for the theological stumbling-block caused by misplacing the doctrine of election, it is entirely removed. It is as a sinner I get the benefit of Christ's death. It is as a lost one I get a salvation which is as free as it is permanent, and as permanent as it is free. All I want, in order to apply to myself the value of the blood of Jesus, is to know myself a guilty sinner. It would not help me the least in this matter to be told that I am one of the elect, inasmuch as it is not in that character God addresses me in the gospel, but in another character altogether, even as a lost sinner.

But then, some may feel disposed to ask, "Do you want to set aside the doctrine of election?" God forbid. We only want to see it in its right place. We want it as a landmark, not as a stumbling-block. We believe the evangelist has no business to preach election. Paul never preached election. He taught election, but he preached Christ. This makes all the difference. We believe that no one can be a proper evangelist who is, in any wise, hampered by the doctrine of election misplaced. We have seen serious damage done to two classes of people by preaching election instead of preaching Christ. Careless sinners are made more careless still, while anxious souls have had their anxiety intensified.

These, surely, are sad results, and they ought to be sufficient to awaken very serious thoughts in the minds of all who desire to be successful preachers of that free and full salvation which shines in the gospel of Christ, and leaves all who hear it without a shadow of an excuse. The grand business of the evangelist is to set forth, in his preaching, the perfect love of God, the efficacy of the blood of Christ, and the faithful record of the Holy Ghost. His spirit should be entirely untrammelled, and his gospel unclouded. He should preach a present salvation, free to all, and stable as the pillars which support the throne of God. The gospel is the unfolding of the heart of God as expressed in the death of His Son, recorded by the Holy Spirit.

Were this more carefully attended to, there would be more power in replying to the oft-repeated objection of the careless, as well as in hushing the deep anxieties of exercised and burdened souls. The former would have no just ground of objection; the latter, no reason to fear. When persons reject the gospel on the ground of God's eternal decrees, they are rejecting what is revealed on the ground of what is hidden. What can they possibly know about God's decrees? Just nothing. How then can that which is secret be urged as a reason for rejecting what is revealed? Why refuse what can be known, on the ground of what cannot? It is obvious that men do not act thus in cases where they wish to believe a matter. Only let a man be willing to believe a thing, and you will not find him anxiously look-

ing for a ground of objection. But alas! men do not want to believe God. They reject His precious testimony which is as clear as the sun in meridian brightness, and urge, as their plea for so doing, His decrees which are wrapped in impenetrable darkness. What folly! What blindness! What guilt!

And then as to anxious souls who harass themselves with questions about election, we long to show them that it is not in accordance with the divine mind that they should raise any such difficulty. God addresses them in the exact state in which He sees them and in which they can see themselves. He addresses them as sinners, and this is exactly what they are. There is nothing but salvation for any sinner, the moment he takes his true place as a sinner. This is simple enough for any simple soul. To raise questions about election is sheer unbelief. It is, in another way, to reject what is revealed on the ground of what is hidden; it is to refuse what I can know, on the ground of what I cannot.

God has revealed Himself in the face of Jesus Christ, so that we may know Him and trust Him. Moreover, He has made full provision in the atonement of the cross for all our need and all our guilt. Hence, therefore instead of perplexing myself with the question, "Am I one of the elect?" it is my happy privilege to rest in the perfect love of God, the all-sufficiency of Christ, and the faithful record of the Holy Ghost.

We must close, though there are other stumbling-blocks which we long to see removed out of the way of God's people, as well as landmarks which are sadly lost sight of.

Features of a NT Assembly

Gérard Roy

A Message given in Puerto Cumarebo, Venezuela

1 Cor. 1:2; 4:17; 7:17; 11:16; 14:33; 14:33

It is very precious to be here with the saints gathered in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ. But the great issue for all of us is, "Do we know why we are here?" For some of you, your parents were in the the assembly, and eventually you also were received. But I want to confront you with this question: Do you know why you should be in an assembly? It is very important that you discover this, because sooner or later, you will be tested. If you haven't bought the truth for yourself, you may be tempted to introduce something into the assembly of God that doesn't belong there. We have read of an assembly of God, and with the help of the Lord, I would like to point out to you some of the distinct features of a church of God. Those verses that we have read in 1 Corinthians, show us that there was a pattern, a design, to which all the churches conformed. In ch. 4:17, Paul tells them that Timothy would "bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every-

where in every church." We have the same idea in 7:17, "and so ordain I in all the churches." Again, in 11:16, "we have no such custom, neither the churches of God." Again in 14:33, "as in all churches of the saints." So that we see that there are certain features that are common to all the churches, and that distinguished them from every other thing around them. The apostle Paul taught the same truths in all the assemblies.

You might ask, "What is church of God?" At first glance, we understand that the phrase, "of God" signifies what belongs to God, and this is very true. But it means more. It is the church of God because it comes from Him, it was conceived in His heart; it wasn't originated by a man. It was designed by God, and the design was revealed to the apostles, and they have taught the truth that they received from God. It isn't from this world, nor from men, but it proceeds from God. The word, "church" signifies "a group called out from", and one might ask, "out of what?" The Lord answers the question in John 17:11, 14, 16, saying that the disciples were in the world, but not of the world. Physically we are in the world, but we don't belong to the world. A church of God is a group of people who have been called out from the world. In this same aspect, then, it is differentiated from the world. God doesn't borrow anything from the world for His church; it is singular, there is nothing that is like the world. It isn't one of various churches, nor just better than those that are called churches. It is the only thing that can be supported with the Scriptures. There is no Scriptural basis for the existence of whatever other thing that is not an assembly according to the New Testament. Other churches don't have any right to exist, according to the Bible.

I would like to look at those things that distinguish a local assembly, or an assembly of God.

1. It is composed of those believers who are gathered only in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Some think that it is enough to put the sign in front, "Christians Gathered in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ," but while this is good and right, this expression really means much more. To be gathered in that marvelous Name of the Lord Jesus Christ is a great privilege, but it also includes a great responsibility. There is an illustration in the Old Testament that has been a great help to me. In 1 Sam. 25, David sent 10 young men to Nabal and told them, "Get you up to Carmel, and go to Nabal, and greet him in my name:" (v.5). In verse 9, "And when David's young men came, they spake to Nabal according to all those words in the name of David, and ceased." David didn't go himself to Nabal, but the men that he sent to Nabal spoke in David's name. This was as if David himself was there; they had the support and authority of David for all that they did and said. When we read Matt. 18:20, with this

illustration in our mind, what it means to be gathered in the name of the Lord is clear. It is clear that the Lord isn't here physically. An assembly is a collective testimony that represents Him in His absence. All is done and said is as if He himself did it. When we profess to be gathered in the Name of the Lord, we are professing a very high truth, and it demands from us an appropriate conduct. It's just as those men were sent to Nabal in the name of David, they couldn't say whatever thing that they wanted to. They couldn't behave themselves however they wanted, because they were representing David. It's the same with us and it's a precious truth. Because of this, when Paul writes to Timothy about the church of God (3:14-16), he speaks about holiness. If this impresses our hearts, it will help us to appreciate all that being gathered in the only Name of the Lord Jesus Christ involves.

2. It is composed only of believers that have been baptized by immersion. We see this in Acts 2:41. Here we have men whose hearts were made sorrowful by hearing Paul's message. They had repented of their sins and put their faith in the Savior. They were truly converted, and were identified publicly with the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom they had believed, in the waters of baptism. So there isn't any room for the unconverted in an assembly of God, since the church of God rejects whatever other name, and is gathered only in His Name, so that baptism precedes reception to the assembly.

3. It is composed of persons who submit themselves to Christ as Lord. This truth is emphasized many times in 1 Corinthians. That is the place that God has given to Him in the Scriptures. It isn't just "Jesus", He is the **Lord Jesus**. And this isn't only a matter of words or of using the correct language. An assembly according to the New Testament is characterized by the clear and sincere recognition of His authority as Lord. When does this recognition of His lordship begin? At the same moment as our conversion. There is an idea circulating that one can have Christ as Savior, but not as Lord. There is no Biblical basis to say this. In Acts 16:30-31, when the jailer asked, "What must I do to be saved?", the apostles responded, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." And Rom. 10:13 says that "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." So that it is in the moment of salvation that we understand in one way or another, the greatness of His person, the rights and the authority that He has over our lives. And this is nothing less than the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of a sinner. 1 Cor. 12:3 tells us that "no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost." The Lord said in Luke 6:46, "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" So that to call Him Lord, isn't only to use the correct language, but it is to submit myself com-

pletely to Him, allowing His Word to have control of my life.

4. It is the place where the Word of God has supreme authority. We don't have a creed, apart from the Bible, no list of things that we should do or shouldn't do, neither have we received an additional revelation from heaven. But we have the Word of God, the great Book of God, and this is all that we need. God has given to us everything in His Word to feed and guide us in our ways. Perhaps you ask me for a Scripture to support this, and it is right that you should ask. In Acts 20:32, Paul, when he was bidding farewell to the elders in Ephesus, he said to them, "And now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the Word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified." The only thing that the elders had to guide them was God and His Word. Anything else is not needed. Do we believe this? Yes, we do. Thanks to God for His Word; we have everything there. We must humble our hearts in His presence and obey His Word. When situations arise in the assembly, and we don't know what to do, it is good to seek counsel from older ones, but always we must return to the Word of God. This is what will preserve us.

5. It is a spiritual and scriptural fellowship, that requires the commitment of every part of all the members. The fellowship in an assembly isn't something merely nominal, but what demands my participation. In man's systems, a person might come to be a member, and go here a little and there a little, rarely opening his mouth, neither to pray, just coming and going as he pleases. But it isn't thus in an assembly that has the Word of God, the great Book of God, and this is that we need. Once I have been received into that fellowship, it demands from me all my power to participate in the activities of the assembly. This is what Acts 2:42, 44 says, so far as those who received his Word, were baptized and received: "And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and the fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. . . and all that believed were together." It is a commitment, a demand. Maybe I am speaking to some young believers. "Are you taking part in your assembly? When you gather with the saints on the Lord's Day, do you bring something to offer to the Lord? When there is any kind of physical work on the hall, are you there to help? When special meetings are held, are you praying and attending to all the meetings possible?" It is moved me here in Venezuela, to see so many believers truly committed to the assembly of God, sacrificing much for the Lord's Work. This is because the believers have understood that it is a commitment to be in the fellowship of an assembly.

6. It is a place where there is liberty for every believer to function as a priest. One doesn't have to

enter an assembly in order to form part of the priesthood. It's better that I enter the assembly because I am a part of the priesthood. Every believer is a part of this holy and royal priesthood, according to 1 Peter 2:5, 9. In human systems, almost always it is only one man who prays and does everything. But in an assembly, every believer has the liberty to pray and worship (the men publicly, the women silently), because we recognize the priesthood of all believers, and it is a truth that is very precious.

7. It is a place for spiritual gift to develop. It is a marvelous thing to see how God, by His Spirit, produces spiritual ability in the assembly, without the necessity of theological courses. God raises young brethren and there is room for the function of these gifts, under the direction of the elders, for the edification of the assembly. We hope, younger brethren and sisters, that you appreciate this and take advantage of it, without abusing it. The assembly of God isn't a place where one can do whatever he wants, but it is a place where you can exercise your gift, according to the confidence that the elders put in you. Thanks be to the Lord for these men, who will know when to stir up every part. Of course, my dear younger brother, if you rarely get up to worship in the Lord's Supper, don't expect that the elders will ask you to preach the gospel. Actually, I believe that we shouldn't ask you to preach, because if you haven't learned how to exercise your priesthood, how can you develop your gift? One doesn't need a special gift to take part in prayer and worship; for this one only needs the gift of eternal life. By this means, one will grow in his appreciation of the Lord Jesus, and will be enabled by the Holy Spirit to preach the gospel. He who has a warmth in his heart, and is enjoying the truth of the gospel in his soul, will show that sincerity and reality when he stands to preach the Word of God to those who are not saved.

The Character of Worship.

Franklin Ferguson

A sweet simplicity marks a Scripturally-gathered Assembly of saints for worship. No human minister or leader or presiding elder are ordained to guide the proceedings. The worshipers are gathered together by Divine appointment to meet their risen and glorified Lord, once crucified for them. A table is spread with a loaf and a cup of wine—simple emblems of His body given and His blood outpoured. The purpose is to show the Lord's death and to remember Him. All are wholly dependent on the Holy Spirit, who is the Revealer of Christ: to the soul, and who brings to remembrance the things concerning Him. He leads forth the worship.

In the Book of Revelation, chap. 5, we see the redeemed multitude worshipping before the Lamb;

occupied with His worthiness, the death He died, the results of His redemption; while praise, thanksgiving and adoration flow from their hearts. This indicates the nature of acceptable worship.

First, we contemplate the Son of God in the past eternity — His glory, majesty, excellence, absolute perfection; Himself the object of the Father's love and delight, the alone worthy One. Behold Him from Heaven's side. See the Son in the bosom of the Father, before the world began. The sight fills our vision, expands our conception of His transcendent glories and supreme worthiness.

Next, we meditate on the amazing stoop from the "excellent glory" to Calvary's suffering and shame. We consider the emptying of Himself of the outward display of glory and majesty, taking the form of a bond-servant, making Himself of "no reputation"; yet fully retaining His attributes as God, though in a truly human body. Deity and humanity united in His Person, but not fallen humanity (Phil. 2:6-8). We think of Him upon the Cross, "The Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29); we think of the "waves and billows of God's wrath going over Him, the Bearer of our sins; we see Him enduring the terrors of the Almighty to save us from the "vengeance of eternal fire" (Jude 7).

"Oh hear that sad, expiring cry,
'Eli lama sabachthani';
Draw near and see the Saviour die,
On the Cross!"

Now we turn to the blessings which flow to man from the sacrifice He made: "Hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood . . . hast made us kings and priests . . . we shall reign." There is in all this the Godward side of the Cross, likewise the manward; an equal balance of the truth is essential to a full standard of worship. God has been glorified; we have been saved. All we have and are we owe it to His blood, it is this personal touch that begets our gratitude and calls forth adoration, praise and thanksgiving. "He loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).

This holy contemplation of our Lord fills the heart, finding expression in hymns, in audible or silent thanksgiving, and by selections from the Word. "Whilst the King sitteth at His table, my spikenard sendeth forth the smell thereof" (S. of S. 1:12). "The Lamb who was slain is alive for evermore" (Rev. 1:18). He whose death we commemorate is coming again, to receive us unto Himself. Then the emblems on the table will be needed no longer, for we shall behold the pierced hands and feet of our Redeemer. But till He comes we show His death in the appointed manner.

Introduction to Second Peter

William Kelly

The authenticity and genuineness of Peter's first epistle needed no word. Yet on its face the writer declares himself with yet more carefulness than when he wrote

before, not as “Peter” only but “Simon Peter,” both name and surname. So, at the Jerusalem conference on the Gentile question, James speaks of him (Acts 15:14) as “Simon” (the Aramaic form of “Simon”), though historically designated “Peter” just before (ver. 7). A forger would have strenuously avoided any such shade of difference, superficial though it be; as he never would have conceived still greater care to attest thus minutely the Peter who added this second epistle. For he now was led with all holy energy and apostolic authority to denounce the false teachers that were to increasingly corrupt the Christian profession, and the scoffers walking after their own lusts, willfully blind to the day of the Lord, through unbelief and materialism.

The late Christopher Wordsworth, an English intellectual and bishop of the Church of England, though loyally defending the true inspiration of this Epistle, pleads that, as “Writings were forged in early times by heretics in the names of Apostles, especially in the name of Peter,” it was therefore incumbent on Christian churches to be on their guard, and not to receive any book as written by an apostle and as dictated by the Holy Spirit, before they were convinced by irrefragable proofs that it was apostolic and inspired. It was therefore the *duty* of all churches to *take time to consider*, before they received any book as the writing of an Apostle. It was their *duty to doubt*.”

The error here is serious enough. “It was the *duty* of all churches” to *doubt*! How little did he mean to surrender the ground of faith! Ecclesiasticism led him thus astray. It is *never a duty*, even for the simplest Christian, to *doubt Scripture*, but only to believe; and if so, what about the duty for all churches, or even for any church, to doubt? Really, it was suicidal, and an utter dishonor to God who inspired the Scriptures, and a shameless failure on the church's part. One of the haughtiest sins of Popery is to set up the claim of the church to decide what is scripture. Whether they vest this prerogative in the church, in the ecumenical council, or in the Pope, makes no radical difference. In every form the bringing in of any authority but God's is treason against His glory.

So far is man, whatever his position, privileges, powers or responsibilities, from having the duty of judging God's word; Instead, God's Word judges man! For man to doubt God's word, or to sit in judgment to pronounce it His or not, is an overthrow of all righteousness and of all grace, one might add of all decency. It is at the peril of any soul, and peculiarly inconsistent with the Christian, or the church, to question what He has written. The Lord has decided for the intrinsic authority of His own words, to say nothing of His unvarying reverence for all scripture as the full and final sentence of God's mind. “He that rejecteth me and receiveth not my sayings hath him that judgeth him: the word which I spoke, that shall judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken from myself, but the Father that sent me, himself gave me commandment what I should say and what I should speak; and I know that his commandment is life eternal. What therefore I speak, as the Father hath said to me, so I speak” (John 12:48-50).

The Holy Spirit is no less precise in affirming the same principle in Heb. 4:12, 13. “For the word of God is

living and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature that is not manifest in his sight; but all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of him with whom we have to do.” What words could more directly refuse the monstrous assumption of the church pretending to accredit scripture, or the still more horrible assertion of its duty to doubt?

The second epistle, like the first, eminently bears on daily life, but with less doctrine, as is natural, being avowedly written afterward to the same persons. Both are exhortative; but the second pronounces, as the first does not, a solemn warning on closing evils, with the severest denunciation of false teachers denying the Sovereign Master that bought them. These bring on themselves swift destruction, and mislead many into their dissolute doings, whereby the way of truth shall be blasphemed; as also by covetousness with feigned words they make merchandise of the saints. Hence prominence is given to these appalling enormities under the garb, not only of professing Christians, but of accepted teachers. This, at a later date, struck superficial observers so strangely as to raise a question of its authorship. But they ought to have recognized the selfsame spirit in the early episode of the apostle's dealing (Acts 8:18-24) with Simon of Samaria, the sorcerer of old. The fervor of love which characterized his evangelizing kindled into a flame against the profanity of the baptized man, who thought to obtain the gift of God with money. Peter therefore pointed him out for the warning of others, yea, of himself as in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity. The advance and spread in corruption now described by the Spirit called for still more energetic terms of abhorrence; as the last chapter exposes the latter-day infidel mockery in a philosophic form.

After the suited salutation in chapter 1:1, 2, the apostle presents grace's foundation of all things for life and godliness in what was already given, even to becoming partakers, not of human nature ameliorated, but of a divine nature through God's precious and exceeding great promises, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. But for this very reason there is diligence needed to make our calling and election sure (3-11). This he shows them in view of his speedy departure, not by any hint of apostolic succession, but by leaving the truth with them, and recalling the wondrous sight vouchsafed to him and two other chosen witnesses of the power and coming of our Lord on the holy mount, even in the days of His flesh, and the Father's voice out of the excellent glory: the divine miniature of the kingdom, in confirmation of the prophetic word, with a hint of a blessedness and hope more surpassing still for their hearts (12-21). And he explains that no prophecy is of its own solution, but rather forms a whole by divine purpose and power converging on God's kingdom.

Then in chapter 2 is the apostle's indignant prediction of the ungodly issue, the germ of which was already at work, and its judgment sure from God. It is thus

the complement of the first epistle. As the latter was occupied with the suffering of the righteous from a hostile world turned to their good; so, the former tells of the doom that must fall on the corrupting false teachers who hypocritically made truth and righteousness a mockery. The judgment on angels that sinned, on Noah's ungodly despisers, on godless and unclean Sodom and Gomorrah are set out as fore-runners of the punishment that awaits the still more guilty that now follow Balaam in his unrighteousness; whatever their high-flown words of vanity, they despised lordship, and were slaves of corruption.

Chapter 3 follows up God's righteous government of the world to the uttermost, in dissolving the heaven and earth that are now, and so, purging the world of all associations with ungodliness, to bring in new heavens and a new earth wherein righteousness dwelleth. But the apostle is not content with withdrawing the veil from the destruction, not only of the corrupt, of covetous and insubordinate, but of the skeptical who rest on the stability of things material, which also perish. The saints who believe in God's promise and wait for these awe-inspiring displays of divine retribution to come, he would have to be found of Him in peace without spot and blameless.

Thus, any unbiased Christian apprehends clearly, even if he had not the inspired writer's word for it, that the two epistles came in the power of the Holy Spirit from the same hand, mind, and heart: the one specially regarding God's present government of the righteous; the other as specially that of the unjust in the future. Only together do they complete the great theme, and this in the style of the great apostle of the circumcision, wholly different from that of James, or John, or Paul, while Jude has his own distinctive character, as can readily be proved in its season. "Ye therefore, beloved, as knowing [things] beforehand, take care lest, being carried away with the error of the wicked, ye fall from your own steadfastness; but grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him the glory both now and to eternity's day! Amen." The close is as directly practical as the beginning; so indeed, rightly applied, is all scripture, and every scripture, as surely profitable for man, as it is inspired of God. But through Peter it is peculiarly evident, and in his second epistle no less than in the first. Yet all is based on Christ's accomplished redemption, the possession of a new and divine nature to preserve from corruption, and a living hope through His resurrection Who is gone into heaven, angels and authorities and powers being made subject to Him.

All views that assert the right of every man to private judgment are false. This directly tends to rationalism, and deifies man. The truth is that God has the right and the authority to send His gospel to every man; and woe be to every man that despises it. So, God addresses His word in general to the Christian and the church; and woe be to such as do not bow and bless Him for it. Now is it not almost blasphemous to say that the saints or the church addressed had the duty of doubting? How a Christian could be beguiled so to think is the

marvel. Human tradition and corrupt ecclesiastical habits for many mistakes.

Take the N.T. facts. Did the church of the Thessalonians doubt the first of Paul's epistles unexampled as it was? Did they not accept without question his written testimony, as they had his oral a little before, not as men's word—but just as it truly is—God's word, which also works in the believer, certainly not in the doubter? It is the more pertinent, because the second of these epistles exposes the fraud of a letter pretending to have come from the apostle, which had imposed on some at least. Thenceforward his salutation with his own hand in every epistle is the token to guard the saints; yet far from him, or even them, the pestilent and unbelieving thought that their church, or any other church, was temporarily to suspend judgment—no, not even when they, or some of them, had just been drawn into error by a deceiver.

And if the sign-manual of Paul sufficed, surely also that of Peter, or Simon Peter! Examining its contents for the church to accept it would have been a snare of the enemy. The inspired word was to judge their conscience; not they to judge it, but to have their hearts invigorated and souls cheered by His grace and truth through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Again, not only did the inspired writer preface his name and apostolic title in fuller fashion than when he wrote before, but he refers to personal facts, one of the weightiest import, the other of the most exclusive nature, early in the second epistle. He pathetically tells them of his knowledge that he was speedily to put off his tabernacle, as his motive for sending them a permanent testimony of what they needed for their continued remembrance. Then he introduces the most magnificent and unique scene ever vouchsafed on earth to saints, himself and his two companions: the transfiguration of the Son of man, acknowledged by the Father as His beloved Son, far above Moses or Elijah, with whom the apostle then foolishly placed Him, as if they could be on common ground. "*Hear Him;*" and as the voice out of the cloud came, Jesus was found alone. Therefore, this Epistle must be either a base imposture, or the last words of love from that apostle.

Nor is there a part of the N.T. more pregnant with wise and holy counsels suited to the wants of the saints, or more characteristic of him that wrote it, following up his former letter. For as his first set forth God's righteous government of His children, founded on His grace which called unto His eternal glory in Christ Jesus, so his second adds that righteous government about to fall on the corrupt false teachers, such as bring in by the bye heresies of perdition (chap. 2), as well as on the infidels that rest on the world's stability to mock at the coming of the Lord (3). The second accordingly is needed to complete the first; just as that to Colossian saints from the apostle Paul completes what he wrote to Ephesians (the fullness of the Head, and the body His fullness). It is to grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.