

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

The Person of
Christ

The Maintenance
of the Truth

Going on to
Perfection

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

We have the Lord's own authority for linking 'things new and old,' and there is much cheer, as well as warning in the ministry enclosed—so suitable for these 'last days.'

W. J. Y.

THE PERSON OF CHRIST.

1 Colossians 1: 12-22; 2: 1; 4: 16.

I think that the people of God are being made to feel—perhaps more definitely now than ever before—that the great point before the Spirit of God is to attach the hearts of His people to Christ. This is not a day when we hear very much about doctrine, although doctrine is important indeed, but the conflict that raged about right doctrine and truth has been fought, and the position to some extent at least has been established. The great issue of the present moment is the place the blessed Lord Jesus Christ personally has in our hearts. The public condition of the assembly at the close of its history here is marked by this solemn fact, that the assembly publicly in Laodicea is indifferent to the person of Christ; that He is outside. It is true that in infinite grace He is outside *knocking*. Nevertheless, He is *outside*, and the Lord says to the assembly of Laodicea: "Because thou art lukewarm (that is, indifferent) I will spue thee out of my mouth." (Rev. 3: 16). It is true that that assembly says: "I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." Dear brethren, we have to beware that we are not satisfied with *goods*. The Lord Jesus is not satisfied with *goods*. We might have accumulated a good deal of intelligence as to the things of God; we might have at our hand what is correct and formal; we might have correct gatherings, correct forms, and be ever so careful about them, and it might be all *goods*—simply that which we have accumulated—and the Lord

Jesus Christ personally have no place in our hearts.

The Lord is not content with anything less than being *inside* the affections of His people. I am sure Scripture, and the public condition of the assembly, confirm the thought that what we each have to overcome in the present moment is a Laodicean state. One has enjoyed seeing how the Lord, in His grace and His tender solicitude for His people, provides *that*, from time to time, which will forestall the activities of evil. The Lord, in His great shepherd care, so safeguards His people, both collectively and individually, that He provides that which, if heeded, if taken account of, will preserve us from a danger which He sees is coming upon us. How beautifully that is illustrated in the case of Abraham. Abraham had gone with his company, and rescued his brother Lot, and the king of Sodom and all the goods that belonged to him, and it says in the book of Genesis that the king of Sodom went out to meet Abraham after he returned from the slaughter of the kings. The king of Sodom went to meet him, and, at that moment, it says Melchizedek came and "brought forth bread and wine," and blessed Abraham, and said: "Blessed be Abram, of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth." Then the king of Sodom comes and says to Abraham: "You take the goods," and Abraham says: "I have lift up my hand to the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth." You see how the Lord anticipated what Abraham would have to face. The king of Sodom offered him all the goods he had saved from the hands of the kings, but the Lord came in through Melchizedek to tell Abraham about the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth, and Abraham takes up that in faith in his soul, and says: "I will not

have from a thread to a shoe latchet. I am in touch with the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth." What tender consideration was in that for the danger that Abraham was in. The Lord knew what was coming, and He anticipated it with ministry that would safeguard Abraham. One is confident that the same has been true ever since. In our individual paths how often it is true. For anything that is before us God gives ministry, light, that is salvation if we heed it, in view of what He knows is coming in amongst His people.

I feel that that is just the position in this epistle to the Colossians. There is no doubt it had a direct bearing upon the assembly at Colosse. There was a condition existing there which needed this epistle to protect and help and deliver the Colossian brethren from dangers that were coming in there. Also, it is clear from the Scripture, that the Lord, and the Spirit of God, and the Apostle Paul had, even in that early day, some anxiety about Laodicea. Long before the Lord spoke or sent His epistle in the Revelation, Paul says: "I would have you know what conflict I have for them at Laodicea. I am in distress, in conflict, for the Laodicean brethren." (Col. 2: 1.) He does not tell us what led him to it. At the end of his epistle he says: "Cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans." (Col. 4: 16.) "There is something in this epistle," says the Apostle, "that the Laodicean brethren need; there is danger ahead for Laodicea, so cause that this epistle be read to the assembly of Laodicea."

I would like to show in a few words that this epistle to the Colossians provides that for us which, if heeded, will preserve us from ever becoming Laodicean in character, and,

indeed, one trusts that, if we are already marked by a Laodicean spirit, the epistle, if heeded now, in conjunction with the Lord's own word in the Revelation, will effect for us deliverance from a Laodicean state. As we have said, what marks the assembly at Laodicea (which is the closing phase of the Church's history publicly) is indifference to Christ personally, and He is outside. If this blessed and wondrous epistle to the Colossians had been heeded when it was read (as the Apostle says it should be), a position could never have arisen in Laodicea where the Lord Jesus Christ was outside that assembly.

I would like to touch a little upon the detail that the Apostle by the Spirit gives as to Who it is that is outside. In the epistle to Laodicea, the Lord says: "Behold, I stand at the door." This epistle develops before our hearts and minds who that "I" is. "Behold, *I* am outside." They had already read this epistle, and we are to take account of this epistle in order that we should be saved from ever being in the condition that leaves the Lord Jesus Christ personally outside.

The first remark we read, which the Apostle has to make about the Lord personally, is this, that He is "the Son of the Father's love." "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light; Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son," or "the Son of His love." (Col. 1: 12-13.) That is the first word as to the Lord personally. He is the Son of the Father's love. He is the One that the Father loves. It is said in the Gospels: "This is My beloved Son." Think of the One whom the Father loves, and into Whose hands He

has given everything and *we, indifferent to Him, having no room for Him, keeping Him outside, knocking!* He is the One whom the Father loves, and if the Father loves Him, surely the corollary must be that everyone should love Him. The Father loves the Son, and that blessed One whom the Father loves says to Laodicea: "Behold! I stand at the door and knock."

Then the Apostle moves on, and says: "In whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins." (Verse 14.) This is another development of the word "I." ("Behold! I stand . . .") "In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins." (Verse 14.) The Redeemer, the blessed Redeemer, is brought before us—the One who, through His blood, has picked us up in Egypt, with all its slavery, with all its darkness, with its rivers that stank, with its frogs, and lice, and hail, and with its death; the One who came into that scene, and by His precious death redeemed us from Egypt, and brought us out of it, and in doing that cleared away our sins from before God. *And we are indifferent to Him! He is outside!* If we read that Scripture with our hearts, how utterly impossible that our Redeemer should be outside, knocking.

Then we read: "Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation." (Verse 15.) It is still the unfolding by the Spirit of the One whom Laodicea needed. "Cause it to be read in the church of the Laodiceans." "Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation." The One we were speaking of together last night, the One who is God's perfect representative in the universe, as having become Man, He is the image of the

invisible God. He represents God. Therefore He is the firstborn of all creation. He takes the place of the Head of the whole creation as God's representative, *and we are lukewarm with regard to Him!* Can it be that we do not care what place God's representative has in our hearts? Think of the profound grace of Christ, God's representative, knocking at our hearts. "Behold, I stand at the door, and am knocking; if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him." What He knocks at, dear brethren, is our hearts. It says of Lydia, "Whose heart the Lord opened." That is what He is knocking at. He would open all our hearts, so that if the church publicly leaves Him out, you and I will not leave Him out—whether locally, as privileged to come together in the light of what is true of the whole assembly, or individually, for "If any man hear My voice and open the door, I will come in to him." He is "the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation."

So it goes on, "For by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers; all things were created by Him and for Him; and He is before all things, and by Him, all things consist." (Verses 16 and 17.) The Apostle moves on another step in the unfolding of that which Colosse, on the one hand, and Laodicea, on the other, needed. He now brings before us this glory. Just think of that! How utterly we are unable to take it in, that the Lord Jesus Christ, personally, is the Creator of the universe. There are the things in heavens, the visible things. Think of the glory of the sun as it rises and makes its heat felt in every part. The Lord Jesus Christ personally made that. And the

moon and the stars of light He made. They were made by Him and for Him. And then there are the invisible things in heaven, the thrones, and principalities, and powers, and might, and dominions. There are Gabriel, and Michael, and the innumerable company of angels, excelling in strength, all made by Him, and for Him, for His service. He could have asked, and He would have had, immediately, more than twelve legions of angels. There were more than twelve legions waiting to immediately answer His word, if He asked, because they were made by Him and for Him.

Then if we come down to the things on earth, everything here is His handiwork. The seas, and mountains, and rivers, and trees, and man, (think of the wonderful wisdom that is expressed in man!) were all made by Him and for Him. Then think of the epistle to Laodicea—that such an one as the blessed Creator, the Creator Who is blessed for ever, should be outside the affections of the assembly—that *we are indifferent and lukewarm in regard to the blessed Creator!* And that He, on the other hand, in infinite grace, should stand at our hearts knocking! What a wondrous thing!

And it goes on, "He is the Head of the body, the assembly." (Verse 18.) Another glory! "The Head of the body, the assembly." What a wonderful vessel the body is. The body, dear brethren, is here composed of all believers in Christ, who have the Spirit of God. "By one Spirit baptized into one body." And that body is here on earth to express the character of Christ. That is the thought of the body. It is in our bodies that we are expressed. The personality lies behind everyone, but the body is the vehicle by which what we are is expressed. There is a

wonderful vessel on earth for the expression of Christ. How we can see it if our minds go back to the early days? We look at a man like Stephen. We see his face shine with the light of heaven. We see him kneel down, as the stones batter his body, and we hear his prayer, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." We say, "What a marvellous, wonderful sight." And we think of a man like Peter, there in prison with two soldiers at his side, and the immediate prospect of death, and we go in and see Peter there, asleep between the two soldiers. We say, "What a wonderful thing." But, dear brethren, Christ is the Head of the body, and that which we so marvel at in Stephen, was derived from the Head. Stephen was one member of the body, and He is the Head of the body. That which we delight in in Peter sleeping there between two soldiers, condemned, was derived from the Head of the body. The Lord Jesus, when He was here, expressed that blessed prayer, "Father, forgive them," and Stephen derived the thoughts of his heart from Christ. And the Lord Jesus, as the storms and the waves and the tempest rolled about Him, was asleep in the hinder part of the ship, undisturbed by the hatred and malice of Satan, asleep in confidence in God. Peter learnt how to do that, from Christ. It was not instinct in Peter and Stephen. It was derived from the Head of the body. What a wonderful person the Head of the body must be, when every single expression of Christ that has ever been given in this scene, from Pentecost until now, was derived from the Lord Jesus Christ. So it says, "He is the Head of the body, the assembly." That is another thought, the assembly. What a wondrous thought that is! What honor and dignity men give to man's

assemblies. You take an assembly in any country, what dignity is associated with the thought that men are members of that assembly. But what of God's assembly? God's assembly, in which, it says, may be seen now that "unto the principalities and powers in the heavenlies might be made known in the assembly, the all-various wisdom of God." In man's assemblies there is the all-various wisdom that man has, but in God's assembly, there is the all-various wisdom of God." Every bit of true wisdom that ever was expressed here since Pentecost is found in God's assembly, and He is the Head of the body, the assembly, and all the wisdom, divine wisdom, that was ever in the church, came from its Head, which is Christ. Think how the Apostle longed, in his conflict, that the brethren in Laodicea should read this, and be preserved from ever being indifferent to Christ—be preserved from ever having that wondrous blessed Person outside their hearts, knocking. "Cause it to be read to the church of the Laodiceans."

And we read further, "Who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things He might have the pre-eminence." (Verse 18.) We cannot touch all these details; but think of that word, "the firstborn from the dead." Mr. Raven said that, "One man out of death, was greater than a world of dead men." One man out of death; and He is that blessed Man Who has the keys of death and of Hades—the first to rise from the dead, and to rise because of what was inherent in His own person. He said to Martha, "I am the Resurrection." It is not a question of the last day; the Resurrection is here, in Him. He says, "I am It." Think of a man out of death. How everybody else fades away in oblivion, as we think of

the one Man out of death, with the keys of death in His hand. The Apostle says, "Cause it to be read to the Laodiceans." *And our hearts are cold, lukewarm, towards the first begotten from the dead.* Think of such an One as He, knocking at our hearts, and finding no response! Oh, dear brethren, this epistle would save us from such a state. "The first-born from the dead, that in all things He might have the pre-eminence." How the One Who controls death, must inevitably be first in everything!

Further, it says, "For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell." (Verse 19.) One feels that our tiny appreciation of Christ cannot take in such a word. It was pleasing, that in Him should all fulness dwell, that all fulness should have its permanent abode in Christ. That was what was pleasing. In respect of every other man, God is the God of measure. He measures out to each one of us, just as much as we can contain of Himself, and, so as we look back over the past of the people of God, we see how one and another had a measure of things expressed and contained in them. The Scripture speaks of "righteous" Abel. Evidently that was the great feature of Abel. He was "righteous" Abel. In his vessel, there was measured something of righteousness. He contained something of it. And Abraham is spoken of, as "faithful" Abraham. He was a man of faith. God put into that vessel, faith in measure. He measured it. It says in Romans, that God has given to everyone, a measure of faith. He has measured out as much light, as to Himself, as we can hold. We think of Moses; the distinctive feature of that vessel was meekness. He was the meekest man in all the earth. He contained in his vessel, a measure of meekness. We

think of Solomon. We hear of the wisdom of Solomon. The Queen of Sheba came from the ends of the earth, to hear the wisdom of Solomon. In respect of Job, it says, "Ye have heard of the patience of Job."

God is pleased to put into each one of our vessels, as much as we can contain, but, when we come to Christ, He was pleased that in Him should all fulness dwell. The whole totality of everything that was of God, abides for ever in Christ. There is nothing measured. How often, in our prayers, we speak in measure. I say "in measure" because we are conscious that everything we have is in measure. But it was pleasing, that in Him, should all fulness dwell. Righteousness, the totality of righteousness, was in Christ. Faithfulness is there in its completeness. Meekness, everything that can be expressed as to meekness, dwells in Him. Wisdom, it is all there; He is the wisdom of God. Patience, the patience of Christ, is there completely. And so everything that you can think of, that is true in God, every one of those excellencies, finds its full, complete, and entire expression in Christ. All the excellencies of the Godhead, dwell in that blessed Person completely. *And do we not care what place He has got in our hearts? Are we content for Him to knock in vain?* God forbid that that wonderful Person, in Whom it was pleasing that all fulness should dwell, should stand at our hearts and say "I am knocking," and we not to open. That is the condition of Laodicea. But the Apostle, with a spiritual eye, seeing what was coming; says, "Cause this to be read to the church of the Laodiceans," heeding which, they would have been saved from what the Lord has to say about them in *His* letter. "And having made peace through the blood

of the cross, by HIM to reconcile all things unto Himself; by Him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. And you that were sometime alienated, and enemies in your mind, by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy and unblamable and unreprouvable in His sight." (Verses 20-22.) We have now, before us, another glory of Christ. The Apostle would bring before the Colossians and Laodiceans, that He is the One Who brings in reconciliation of everything in heaven and on earth; the One Who has come in, to take out of heaven and earth, every trace of alienation towards God. He is going to put out of the moral universe everything that is irreconcilable, and is going to bring in a heaven and earth completely in accord with the heart of God. In the meantime he says, "And you, that were sometime alienated, and enemies in your mind, by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death." You and I, individually in the meantime, anticipating the day when everything in heaven and on earth will be in accord with God, through the work of Christ, have had taken out of our hearts, the alienation and the enmity, and we have been brought to God. The distance, and the fear and hatred that were once in our hearts towards God, have been taken away by Him. How our hearts should draw to Him in that connection. How sad that One Who has brought in reconciliation should have to say "Behold, I stand at the door, and am knocking." One feels, in the light of these things, that if the Laodicean assembly had really read them with their hearts, they could never have reached the condition that the Lord has to speak of as true of them, in the Revelation.

God grant that everyone of us may be preserved in devoted allegiance and affection to Christ. It is as we lay hold, in our hearts, upon the unfolding of His infinite glory, so that He is more to us than anything the enemy can ever present, that we shall be preserved.

W.J.H.

Adelaide.

March, 1926.

(An impressive letter from J.B.S., as he was nearing his end, was read at the Quemerford meetings in 1896, and Mr. Raven then rose, and gave the following address.)

MAINTENANCE OF THE TRUTH.

Joshua 5

I would not venture to say anything at all, after what has been before us, did I not in some sense feel conscious of having a word from the Lord. And what I first wish to press upon each one is our individual responsibility in regard to the maintenance of the truth. It is very easy to put the responsibility of maintaining the truth on those who minister the truth. It is certainly not given to everyone to minister the truth. Ministry is in the power of gifts from Christ, and He claims to be sovereign in that matter; and it is a privilege to minister in the truth. But I say without any hesitation that it is the responsibility of every one of us to maintain the truth. We do not maintain the truth by clinging tenaciously to the terms of the truth, but by being, ourselves, exponents of the truth. You may think what I say is hard, but I judge that we ought *to be prepared* to surrender everything—whatever we have been in this life, the dearest ties and associations, whatever honor or glory or position we may have—in order to be exponents of the truth, which the Lord has given us to maintain. It is very easy to justify having things agreeable here—and God may allow us to enjoy many things here—but they may readily be too prominent with us, and when they are, the truth has a second place; and which, I ask, should have

the first place—the things of this life, or the truth? Every right-minded person would allow that the truth is to be the first thing, and we are at all costs to maintain it, and the divine way to maintain it, is by ourselves being the expression of it, and everything has to be subordinate to that. So I say that, in a sense, the less a man has in this world the better. If we have confidence in God, God can care for His people, and He is not limited to human methods. People make provision for their families in their way, and think that God is bound to that way. God has His own way, and can make provision in His own way; He is not bound to any particular way.

I think we often lack in piety. Faith is, that we have the light of God's things; piety is, that we bring God into our own things. If you make the truth the first concern and are here entirely for the Lord, the Lord will own you, and He will provide for your things; we have no need to be anxious on that score. For myself, I can say, that it is the line which I would seek to follow.

I only say that, by way of preface, for what I want to come to is this—we have heard of what the Lord has been pleased to give back to us in these last days—the truth that Christ, the glorified Man, is the Head in heaven, and that His body is here. There are thousands of Christians who would allow the body in glory. What I saw long since, was that the practical difficulty with saints lay in inability to realise the truth that the body was *here* in completeness. I imagine that it is accepted by everyone here today, that the body is here, and that Christ is Head to the body. That is the prominent truth, as I should understand, which the Lord has given back to us in this century, and in which we have to stand.

There is another cognate truth, and that is, that the body is derived from Christ. Eve was taken from Adam, that she might be united to Adam. No other was fit to be a helpmeet for him. So the body has been taken from Christ in the time of His death to Israel, in order to be fit to be His companion in glory—His bride; that is, that she might be for His pleasure and share His honor. I just refer to it, because that is what God has been pleased to bring us to.

I want to say another word in regard to our responsibility to maintain the truth. There are two things here to which we have to return; two things which marked saints at the beginning. Where there has been departure, you are bound to go back to first principles, and you have to go to the outset to find them. If the Spirit of God has opened your eyes in any measure to the true state of things, that is what you have to do. Now the two things to which I refer, are great safeguards; and you must keep within them if you want to be in the truth, and in liberty from what is about. They are the reproach of Christ and the power of the Spirit. If I may speak of them as principles (though they are not exactly principles, for the Spirit of God is not a principle), these are what you must hold to, if you want to be maintained in liberty from all that is about us—that is, from Babylon.

I want to show the working of these principles at the beginning and now. You must remember that at the time Christ came the people of God were under the power of Babylon. Of course, it was the Roman power at the moment, but it was the continuation of Babylon; it was the lower part of the same great image. That is where the people of God were at the moment—captive to Babylon;

they had been under captivity *in* Babylon, now they were not captive *in* Babylon, but *to* it. The course of things is prophetically told by the prophet, Isaiah. God brought a remnant of the people back into the land under Gentile protection, in order that Christ might be presented to them. That was the external state of things, and Christ was presented to the responsibility of the people; but, as to ecclesiastical form and order, everything was under the protection of the Gentile power. The Gentile power was dominant, and, if it saw fit to set aside the Jewish form and order, it had power to do it. If it saw fit to maintain it, they could have it. They were dependent on the Gentile power. Christ was presented to the responsibility of the people under these conditions, but rejected.

The point is this: the Babylonish power was not set aside. Christ was crucified at the hand of that power. The Gentile was guilty in this. The Jew cast Him out of the vineyard, and put him into the hand of the Roman power, and that power was immediately responsible for crucifying the Lord of glory. The apostle holds that the princes of this world crucified the Lord of glory. God did not come in at the moment to destroy the Romish power; on the contrary, He allowed it to remain, and to completely set aside the Jewish polity and ecclesiastical order. The whole thing was broken up, Jerusalem became a heap of stones, and it was done by the hand of the beast—the Roman power; and the ecclesiastical order—the camp—was completely set aside.

Now I would ask, how were the saints—the remnant of that day—who did not surrender the truth (for the mass had turned apostate), how were they to escape from the Babylonish power? For Rome was not pub-

licly judged at that time; on the contrary, it got more complete power. I will tell you how they were set free from it. It was by the acceptance of the two principles to which I have referred, the reproach of Christ and the power of the Spirit. It was thus that Christians were saved in that day from the Babylonish power. In accepting the reproach of Christ they were delivered from ecclesiastical form and order, from dependence on the camp, as we read in the last chapter of Hebrews: "Let us go forth, therefore, unto Him, without the camp, bearing His reproach," and had no longer occasion to look for countenance from the Gentile power. They might, in leaving the camp, have to come under the reproach of impiety, for that matter, but they did not concern themselves about that. Their language was, Christ suffered without the gate; we go to Him and bear His reproach. In thus leaving outward form and order, they became independent of man, and dependent on a power which man cannot understand at all—on the power of the Spirit of God. Some may perhaps say: Did not the apostles set up an ecclesiastical form and order? I believe the apostles set up nothing but what was in the power of the Spirit of God. Jew and Gentile were builded together, to be the habitation of God through the Spirit; but that is not form or ecclesiastical order, that is spiritual. The idea of it is that the saints are "a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices." The whole thing was pervaded by the Spirit. That is my idea of what was set up by the apostles; nothing outside the vital power of the Holy Ghost in the soul, and that was the work of the apostles. The point, to me, is this:—that Christians were practically set free from the Romish power because they were not depen-

dent on it. They were prepared to suffer, as Christ had suffered, if need be; they had nothing but the Spirit of God. The two things that guarded them, were the reproach of Christ and the power of the Spirit.

Now I want to come to the present time, which is much more difficult. Things are in such confusion. Babylon is now within; not the Romish power, but the popish power, and I want to tell you the character of that power. It is a *worldly* power. I do not believe in the inherent power of the Pope a bit. He is ruled by the world. How did he get his power? By trimming his sails to the powers that were, and playing off one against another. It was diplomacy, by which he maintained and does maintain his power; but he is not the power, the world is the power. The *form* of Babylon is ecclesiastical, and there the saints were in bondage; but in being in bondage to popery they were in bondage to the world.

And how have we got free? On just the same principles as at the beginning, namely, by being apart from ecclesiastical form and organisation and order in the acceptance of the reproach of Christ, and by the power of the Spirit. I want everyone to weigh these things, to see the immense importance of them. It is only thus that we can be maintained free from the tyranny of the world-power which has come into the professing church.

I do not believe that the Lord intended that the prominent thing with us should be ecclesiastical form and order. The assumption of this was the first great declension at Plymouth, the evil which sought to isolate the meeting there, and to give to it a certain distinct form. We do not want to fall into the same error. We are in the scene of Christ's reproach, in the place in which He has been

rejected, and we should be distrustful of everything which is not the immediate fruit of the power of the Spirit of God. If we look at the things about us, as, for instance, the State Churches, we see that, while they have escaped, in a certain sense, from Rome, they have halted half way, and have set up in some degree, the same thing in themselves. They are not in liberty. Then the various dissenting systems have set up for themselves, a form and order—not exactly on the lines of Babylon; but they have not escaped the bondage of the world, and are fast going back under it. Why? Because they have not accepted the reproach of Christ and the power of the Spirit. We have professedly accepted both, and they are our safeguards. The moment you surrender either, you will get back into bondage to the great world-power. You may get back into it in a greater or less degree, but you will surely end there if you travel away from these two great principles.

What we find in this chapter (Joshua 5) connects itself very intimately with what I have sought to put before you, and I may remark first, that what we come to here is typical of *assembly* privilege and blessing, that is, of what is not individual, but collective. Where it is a question of the wilderness, everything is individual. The wilderness regards the saints as individuals; we enter into that path in which we prove God individually. My exercises in the wilderness are not the exercises of another, and the exercises of another saint are not my exercises. The experience of God, which I gain in the wilderness is my own, and the experience which another gains is not mine. As has often been said, the wilderness formed no part of the purpose of God, but of His ways. It is where we learn

His ways, where we learn practically what God is to us; and there it is that the manna is the food of our souls. We are supported here by the grace of Christ. Manna is daily grace for daily need. It was Christ's path as a man here. The wilderness is where I learn what Christ was in His lonely pathway down here; the lowly grace of the heavenly Man, the perfect setting forth of what is according to God "in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is," as we get it in Psalm 16, and again in Psalm 23.

But here in Joshua 5 we come in type to church associations, to that which is collective and corporate.

The first point to which I want to call your attention is in verse 1. When all the kings on the other side of the Jordan "heard that the Lord had dried up the waters of Jordan . . . their heart melted, neither was there any spirit in them any more, because of the children of Israel." Mark the connection with this of the next verse, "*at that time* the Lord said unto Joshua, Make thee sharp knives and circumcise again the children of Israel." You would have thought that if there was no more spirit left in the kings because of what God had done for Israel, that the way was clear for the children of Israel, and that it merely remained for them to go up and take possession. But a great deal of preparation was needful on their part. The first thing you get is circumcision. Circumcision has to be realised in the saints. Why so? That they may "keep the unity of the Spirit in the uniting bond of peace." We could not go further without circumcision. That is what we have come to. What is it that brings in divergence of feeling and judgment among saints? Not the Spirit, but the flesh. Before we can get on collectively, you

must have "the putting off the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ." Without that you cannot keep in the unity of the Spirit. Every one is responsible to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. What is the unity of the Spirit? It is a unity of judgment and spiritual affection, and there is no real unity apart from spiritual affections. I cannot understand it without. How the Spirit produces it, I judge, is that He keeps the saints under the influence of God's love and that is the way in which we are bound together.

When I look around at a company of saints it is not unity of doctrine I look for, I should not care for our bond to be unity of doctrine, but I look for unity of affection. Doctrine is not the bond of perfectness but love. We may be lacking as to affection though orthodox as to doctrine. I cannot understand the unity of the Spirit apart from spiritual affection, and it is to be kept in the uniting bond of peace. Peace is there, on God's part there is no disturbing element. God has removed every cause of disturbance. The only thing likely to intrude is the flesh, and it is to be kept out by the power of the Spirit; we are to be maintained in this unity, and to be diligent to keep it in the bond of peace. To that end there is circumcision: "the putting off the body of the flesh through the circumcision of Christ." The body of the flesh I understand to be the weight, the incubus of the flesh; the whole thing goes. That breaks the link with Egypt. If flesh goes, Egypt is gone. Flesh subsists in the things of Egypt, not of the wilderness or of the land. Flesh must have its food, and the food of flesh is in Egypt. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life. If the body of the flesh is put off the link with Egypt is for

ever broken. Thus, the flesh is not to intrude at all. The moment it intrudes it brings in a bit of grit, and so disturbs the peace. God has been pleased in divine goodness to remove everything that had any title or pretension to disturb. Now we are at liberty, and privileged to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace; let us look to it then that we do not fail in this! Let us see that our hearts are kept under the influence of divine love, and that thus we *love* one another, and not *watch* one another to see if there be evil. It ought to be pain to see evil in one another; we need to be enlarged in the knowledge of divine love and in love to one another. How can I prove that I love God? By loving the brethren. "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" "Every one that loveth Him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of Him."

That is the first great principle, and so far we have only come to human weakness. If the body of the flesh is put off man has come to the extremity of human weakness, he is no longer supported by natural power. Natural power is connected with the flesh, but I do not accept that support. (Ver. 9.) "This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you." I cannot attempt to carry out the things of God in the energy of the flesh; there is no resource left now but the Spirit of God, and, in that, man is as to himself weak. As sure as you are in the power of the Spirit of God, you will know that you are weak, "When I am weak, then am I strong." Where the Spirit of God is, there is bound to be the sense of weakness.

In Israel, it may be remarked, the males

only were circumcised, because they were the strength of Israel. But it is not so now. The males are not the strength of the church. "By one Spirit we are *all* baptised into one body." "As many of you as have been baptised into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek . . . there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." (Gal. 3: 27, 28.) Every one now is to have put off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ. It is a principle of universal application: and on it hangs the truth of our being one body in Christ.

We read in verses 10, 11, "And the children of Israel encamped in Gilgal, and kept the passover . . . and they did eat of the old corn of the land on the morrow after the passover, unleavened cakes, and parched corn in the self-same day." Two things go together here, following on the morrow of the passover; there is unleavened bread, which maintained circumcision, and, at the same time, the old corn of the land. The first is what the apostle put before the Corinthians, "Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: therefore let us keep the feast . . . with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." Here you get the two things combined, and if you know anything about the old corn of the land you will be certain to keep the feast with unleavened bread.

You may ask, What do you understand by the "old corn of the land?" I will tell you—"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things that are above." If you can tell me what is proper to and characteristic of Christ in the scene where He is, I will tell you what the old corn of the land is: It is not the manna; the manna is the grace of Christ in a scene where all is contrary. By the old

corn of the land I understand all that is ~~characteristic~~ of Christ in a scene where everything is congruous. Christ is gone back into that scene from which He came, where all is suitable. There is no change in that sense morally, and Christ is the centre there, and commands and controls all spiritual affections. That is to me the thought of the old corn of the land. If we know what it is to have to say to that scene, we shall not fail to eat the unleavened bread; you may be sure we shall realise that sincerity and truth are suitable if we know anything of the "things above" where Christ is sitting.

One word more; I understand the eating of the old corn of the land to be not individual but collective privilege. Here you are come, I think, on to assembly ground. It is like the new man, the two (Jew and Gentile), made in Christ into one. I think the old corn of the land has been looked at too much as food individually. It appears to me that it refers to the affections and joys of the holiest, what we feed on in communion. It is spiritual privilege, the appropriation of Christ in what He is before the Father in heavenly affection and order. If you accept that you will understand why the manna ceases. The moment I enter into that scene in which Christ is Head I have done with the wilderness and the individual path, and for the moment I have done with the manna. I have to go back to it; but I enter in spirit on a scene where Christ is all, and for the moment the manna ceases. Of course, you get it presented only typically in Joshua 5, for when Israel were actually come into the land the manna ceased completely. And, for the Christian, when we truly reach assembly ground, when we enter into the scene of heavenly affections, the

manna ceases, and you eat the old corn of the land.

The old corn of the land connects itself as we have seen with unleavened bread; and so in Hebrews 10 it says: "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith." "They did eat of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year." (Ver. 12.) The fruit of the land of Canaan is what is proper to heaven.

One point more. All that we have seen is paving the way for conflict. (See Verses 13-15.) And in speaking of conflict I may refer to a mistake into which I think we have fallen. We have been accustomed to say that Christ is Head to the assembly, and that He is not Lord to the assembly. I quite admit He is Head to the assembly, but the working of that is that we think when we come to the assembly we have done with the Lord. I admit Christ is not Lord to the assembly as such, but the assembly is privileged to be with the Lord in the conflict. I see in Ephesians we are to be "strong in the Lord and in the power of His might;" I do not think that is individual. It is a question of conflict and testimony. The privilege of the assembly is to be with the Lord in the conflict against the power of evil.

The mistake Joshua made was in thinking that the Lord was to be with them, as if the captain of the Lord's host was to fight their battles. He asks: "Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?" The angel says directly: "Nay; but as captain of the host of the Lord am I now come." It is not a question of My being with you, but of your being with Me. That is the great point. If we understand anything about collective privilege—that is, if we know Christ as the Head of the assembly, then there is another privilege conferred, and that is, to be with Him in conflict against His ad-

versaries—to be associated with Him against the power of evil. I do not think that is much understood by the saints. I think we know what it is to love the Lord individually, to confess Him as Lord, to love Him, and to look for His appearing, and we rejoice to have the Lord with us in our pathway through the wilderness; but that is all connected with our individual path, and there is another thing, which is the proper privilege of the church, namely, to be *with the Lord* in conflict with the wickedness in the heavenly places. “Our conflict is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against wicked spirits in heavenly places.”

One word more in connection with verse 15. “Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy.” The ground is holy. When you are with the Lord in spiritual conflict, you will not do much if you do not follow holiness. You must put off your shoes from off your feet, for it is holy ground you are upon. You are with the Lord. You have known Him in the assembly declaring the Father’s name to His brethren, leading the praises there; you have tasted that. But now there is the being with Him in the spiritual conflict; and the ground on which you stand is holy.

I only took up this chapter just to indicate these things; and what we have come back to are the two principles that we spoke of—the reproach of Christ and the power of the Spirit. We have escaped in measure from Babylonish captivity, but the liberty can only be maintained on the principles on which we began; we cannot surrender them for a moment; we must accept the reproach of Christ in the power of the Spirit. The Spirit *is here*; the Spirit has come down, and con-

victs the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. He is the power to maintain for Christ; and if we accept the reproach of Christ we know no power but that of the Spirit.

You have come to spiritual circumcision that every difficulty between one and another may be removed, that we may be able to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace; and in eating the old corn of the land you have come to heavenly association; and the manna, the food of the wilderness, ceases; and you have come to the Captain of the Lord's host; you are occupied with His interests; you are led by Him into conflict with the power of evil—and the place is holy.

Do not make the fatal mistake of supposing that this refers only to those who minister—that no one is responsible for maintaining and guarding the truth but those who minister it. The spiritual circumcision refers to all. We all have to stand to the truth of it. It is not the "males" now, we have all as a company to stand in the truth which we have professed to accept. "We being many are one body." "All one in Christ." Though it may only be given to a few to minister, it is the responsibility and privilege of each one to stand to, and seek to maintain, the truth, and that, not by dogmatism, but by being exponents of it.

—F.E.R.

GOING ON TO PERFECTION.

The beginning of everything necessarily refers to its finish or completion. If the beginning is not right, the end cannot be right; "That which is crooked cannot be made straight." Hence, the Nazarite, when he failed, had to begin over again. From the hand of God everything has had a good beginning, and if there had been no obstruction to its full development, each thing would have reached perfection of its kind. But everything here has suffered through the perverseness of man. Hence, in every period when there was real reviving of the heart to God, there was a return to the beginning, as God has first presented it; but the return to the beginning was not with the intention of continuing at the beginning, but of going on to perfection. It is but too evident that, if the beginning is the limit to one's aim, then that which was necessary as a true start becomes a snare; and the immatured beginning is a dwarf or reproach, instead of a testimony, to the praise of God.

Joshua felt this with regard to Israel when they were discomfited before their enemies, lest the nations should say that God was not able to bring them in. Even as it is said of men: "This man began to build, but was not able to finish."

When the beginning is of God, the same power which produced the beginning can alone effect maturity; and when the Lord is not hindered, it must be so. It is no new thing to be said, "Ye did run well, who did hinder you?"

In every time the greatest favor from God was when He led one or more of His people to return to the old paths; and surely it has been an unequalled favor, that He has been pleased to revive the truth of the Church in these closing days. But the greater the blessing, the more should we be on our guard lest we should lose it, as it has happened to many aforetime; and these things "are written for our admonition, on whom the ends of the ages are come." Through the grace of God there are thousands, who can with thankfulness own that they have been led to see the right beginning; therefore, the question now is: Are we maturing? Are we advancing from this right beginning? Or are we contenting ourselves with having started aright, as if that was enough, without making any further advance. If we are, we shall be, as it were, spiritually petrified, while boastful of our beginning! Like Israel, saying: "The temple of the Lord are we," when they were not able to lift up their heads before their conquerors.

The danger now is, as there has been through the goodness of God a good beginning, that, through the artifice of the enemy, we should not mature or go on to perfection. If there be no advance from the right beginning, there is not only no power, but the continuance in a state without any maturing is a pitiable reproach, instead of a testimony to the glory of God.

In reading through the Scriptures how frequently it must strike us, that men of God began well, but did not go on to perfection. Noah begins well, but is unintentionally overpowered by the product of his own hands. It may be alleged that he had departed from his beginning; that is true, but the departure was in consequence of his not having gone

on advancing in the line and manner of his beginning, just as it was with Lot, who, having started aright, was led away by the green fields of Sodom. But the greatest danger is when we content ourselves with our beginning, or with the recovery of a lost standing, as Jacob did at Shalem. He had returned to the land. It was a great favor from God to bring him back; and he had learned in the morning after the night of wrestling, the great truth that his name was Israel. But he did not go on from that. He was so contented after his return to the land with this good beginning that he stops there, and settles at Shalem. There is no thought in his mind to fulfil his promise, or to go on to the completion of it, which was Bethel. This is our great danger, and here hundreds have failed. The beginning has not been surrendered; the truth of the Church, the distinctive one for this period has not been given up, but there has been no advance. There has not been in many cases any growth in the knowledge of it as it is in the mind of God. There has been a settling at Shalem. The truths revived at the beginning are not denied, but there is no divine advancement. Souls are as practically ignorant of what the Church is as the mystery of God, as if they had never accepted the truth of it. If we look around, how rare it is generally to see any maturing in the knowledge of the mystery of God! It is a comfort that those who desire to grow are sure to do so, but those who content themselves with the mere truth, are like Jacob at Shalem; they are not maturing, and they will become as he did, a reproach instead of a testimony to the name of the Lord. It is common with man, when his power is less than his position, to fall back on the latter, in order to obtain for himself what the former would have secured

to him; and, thus, the man of God who rests on his position betrays himself, he has not power; he is not walking with God; and he seeks to obtain a relief for his conscience by asserting his position, when he has not power to maintain it; for there is never power where there is not the activity of life; when one is not "adding" according to 2 Peter 1; when one does not "add to faith courage," etc.

We see continually in Israel's history how they began well, but, failing to complete their undertaking, were reduced to impotency and reproach. They were saved from death, and ate the passover, and went up out of Egypt; but, before they were delivered from Egypt's power, they said unto Moses: "Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? Wherefore hast thou dealt with us to carry us forth out of Egypt?" Is there no parallel to this in our day? Do we not see many accepting with satisfaction the truth of the gospel; but, even before deliverance, before holy separation from the scene of judgment is known, there is repining in the heart which is really reluctant to leave the world; for nothing but resurrection-power can lead us outside it. They had begun well, and were placed by the grace of God in perfect safety in the scene of judgment; but, alas! when they were thus favored they became a spectacle of unbelief, because they had not faith in God to reach the finish. An unfinished act always indicates imbecility, and is a reproach; and it is the reproach that remains, and not the power which marked the beginning.

On almost every new start there was a recurrence of this lamentable tendency. Soon after the song on the other side of the Red Sea, they murmured. Again, they came to the borders of the land, and would not go in

because discouraged by the evil report of the spies. Further on they *were* placed in the land, but were overpowered in it, because they did not complete what they had undertaken. "They soon forgot His works, they waited not for His counsel. They forgot God their Saviour which had done great things in Egypt, for they despised the pleasant land; they believed not in His word, but they were mingled among the heathen and learned their works." Everything of God must meet with opposition in a world of evil; but His power, the same which enables us to begin, is able to ensure a completion of His will. When the eye has been diverted from God, discomfiture and failure must ensue. The blessed God cannot allow that His calling should be only partially entered on. When we stop, or permit ourselves to be hindered, we lose His support; and we soon disclose that we are worse off than when we never had it. A great elevation suddenly lost, leaves one in a more abject condition than if one never had it.

Ezra, in his day, and the remnant of Israel, with great purpose of heart, confiding in the Lord, journeyed from Babylon to Jerusalem, and commenced the rebuilding of the temple. As long as they bravely defied the enemy they succeeded, but when they yielded to the pressure and contented themselves with their position in the land—with their good beginning, they forfeited even personal blessing; they "sowed much, but it came to little." (See Hag. 1: 9, 11.) They lost the support of God on every side, when they ceased to advance in order to complete the undertaking they were called to. They might have contended that they were in the land; that they were on the right ground; all true, but they were not maturing; and hence they were reduced to a miserable condition in the land—in their high

position. Nothing is so sad or humiliating as misery in a high position. The moment anyone is content with his progress, or his measure of light, then he is resting in what he is or has, and not in God; and there is neither freshness in his soul nor vigor in his testimony. The gifts and calling of God are without repentance. We cannot lose what we have entered on, because the whole is ours through grace, though we surely lose enjoyment in it. Israel did not lose the land, because they had declined from their proper work; neither do we lose the measure of the truth we have reached because we are not growing up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even the Christ; but it is important to see that, when we limit ourselves to what we have, and do not press on to the finish of it, the Lord does not give us more. He does not confide His mind to us, He does not give us any fresh opening of the Word as to the great circle of His interest. There may be given words of comfort and instruction for the daily need of souls, but the things that He would disclose to His friends—His present interest as Head of His body—the Church, is not communicated. If the chief subject in the heart of Christ is hardly ever referred to, and when referred to is as something unknown, surely there must be very little intimacy between us and the Lord; and I feel convinced that there is no surer test than the extent in which Christ's interests in the Church is in one's mind and affection. If the Church be the dearest object to Christ's heart, how could I be near Him without becoming interested in what He is interested in, and how could I fix as a limit for myself, that I am on the true ground—that I believe in Matthew 18:20, and that's enough?

Can any one read the Acts of the Apostles,

and not see how the apostles themselves lost ground by continuing at Jerusalem, and how James and the great company with him, were eventually behind the testimony, because they had confined themselves to the measure of Christianity that suited Jerusalem? Would Paul place a limit to the saints when he writes: "Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ?" There is to be no limit. The effect of a limit is to check the power of God. Thus it was at the Reformation. To secure justification by faith was the one thing proposed, and all was limited to this. And in this day the danger has been, that, having found the right ground for Christian fellowship, this should be the limit, and that progress from this is not necessary. Is this good beginning the finish? Certainly not. Why, then limit it? If we do not mature, we shall not only lose the power to mature, but we shall sink into reproach and impotent disorder; the very opposite to the beautiful beginning which God favored us with.

If we mark the course of every good beginning, we shall see there was prosperity and power—the faith sounding out, as long as there was progress or maturing in the truth; and surely for every anointed eye in the present century, there is abundant evidence of the verity of this statement. Joy and strength marked those who were advancing in the line they had entered on. Very ignorant at first, they gradually got more light, and, as the light came, they walked according to it; so that there was a remarkable alteration in one thing or another, and an abandoning of things once admitted or sanctioned, for ways consonant with their increased light. Many at

the present hour have more light than the first great pioneers had at the beginning. And, if one would shelter himself for not walking up to it, under the subterfuge that he is the same as those at the beginning, he ignores the light which has been given during the last sixty years, and lands himself in a company of believers more or less encumbered by human rules.

God grant that His own may be awakened to see that no beginning, however good, can in any way make up for the completion in the mind of God; and that they may see that, if we content or shelter ourselves with a good beginning—the right ground—we shall infallibly lose our power in testimony, and ere long will be an open reproach where there once was a bright beginning.

—J.B.S.

I trust it will be remembered in any ministry that all truth centres in Christ, and not in the saints. It is their privilege to be in Christ by the Spirit, and thus in the full light and blessing. "In *Him* dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily."

While expatiating on the blessings that belong to the Christian, I doubt if the saints are really touched; but, if once their eyes are opened to an apprehension of the universe of bliss, of which Christ is the Head and Centre, and of *His* capability to fill it, their souls will be lifted up, and they will readily learn their own part in the blessing.

—F.E.R.

Communications to W. J. Young,
272 Spencer St., Melbourne, Australia