

Key New Testament Themes

David Gooding

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Matthew's Gospel

Structure and Some Major Themes

Introduction

The general scheme is that I should help you by coming in and rowing alongside you so that, in this good democratic society, your voice is supreme and it's for you really to tailor this course how you wish it to go. So don't be afraid today, and in the subsequent days, to voice your opinions. I'm aware that you are investing quite a large amount of time in this particular week and I want to help you to get the maximum benefit from it. So I shall be starting off today, but if you find the kind of thing I'm doing not to be too helpful, please say so and we can order the remainder of the course more to fit you.

Proposed approach

Now I believe you were brought here under somewhat false pretences, with some grandiose title like 'A survey of the whole of the New Testament plus Apocrypha', or something. That of course is quite impossible, but that's the way of advertisers! What I propose to do, if you give me free rein, is to take perhaps one book of the Gospels today and another tomorrow, as representative of the Gospels. Then on the Wednesday and Thursday, to take an epistle on each occasion, as representative of the Epistles, and then perhaps, if we have time, we shall deal with the Revelation. What I will not attempt to do is to give an outline of these books. Outlines are available to us all and you have long since read many and forgotten all about them, I suspect. Outlines can be very superficial things.

What I would like to do is to suggest one or two approaches to the Gospels and look at the kind of thing the Gospels themselves are saying. The Gospels are historical books and it is perfectly legitimate for us to take any fact or incident in the Gospels and to make of it what we will, because the Gospels are fact. If you like to take the phrase, for instance, that our Lord said to Peter, 'Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch' (Luke 5:4), and you say, 'Well the Greek for nets is such and such and that corresponds to our dragnets nowadays, and the thing about dragnets is that they should be the right size and not take too small a fish', and so forth, and make whatever you like of dragnets. Well, that's perfectly true: some of them were dragnets and some weren't.

But what I shall be attempting to show is that the Gospel writers themselves are interested in certain themes. If we can determine what those themes are, then those themes will come to us with all the greater authority. It is not a question of our taking a passage and making something out of it as we see fit; it is rather determining what the original Gospel

writers intended to convey, what they are discussing. Of course, one man's perception of these things will differ from another's and you may see some other things. That's perfectly true, and in that spirit I go about my comments this morning, putting into the pool of your thinking—along with all the other host of things that you have thought and will think, and the way that you come at Scripture—a contribution of mine to see whether it is helpful or not.

Basic structure

So on that basis we proceed, and I thought this morning to start at the beginning and look at the Gospel by Matthew. We'll spend just a few moments talking about the way Matthew has organized his material. As you know, before he gave up his profession for full-time work for the Lord, he was an income tax collector and presumably used to keeping records—if not doctoring them! He shows his characteristic style in the way he has organized his material in his Gospel. He doesn't necessarily follow chronological order, but has large groupings of material in his book. Let's look how that happens.

Narrative section

If we can take our Bibles in hand and look at Matthew, and turn the pages quickly, there's the story of our Lord's birth in chapter 1, and Herod's reaction and so forth in chapter 2. Then there is the story of John the Baptist at the beginning and the baptism of our Lord at the end of chapter 3; an account of the temptation in chapter 4 and, following that, the beginning of our Lord's ministry. 'From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand"' (4:17); and he's calling his disciples to follow him and join in the work. So four chapters therefore of virtually nothing other than narrative. There is a little preaching from John the Baptist and so on, but it's largely narrative concerned with the birth of our Lord and then the beginnings of his ministry.

We come to 4:23, and we notice, not a particular incident, but a very general statement summing up our Lord's ministry.

And he went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria: and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, epileptics, and paralytics, and he healed them. And great crowds followed him from Galilee and the Decapolis, and from Jerusalem and Judea, and from beyond the Jordan. (4:23–25)

Teaching section

Now in chapters 5–7, you'll notice at once the change in the character of the contents. Here it is not a narrative of individual incidents, but a tremendous block of teaching—commonly referred to as *the Sermon on the Mount*—moral and spiritual teaching. At the end of chapter 7 we see a typically Matthew thing—you've probably noticed it in your own readings—'And

when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes' (7:28).

Section markers

Now notice that phrase, 'when Jesus finished these sayings', because it's a phrase Matthew will use as a method of organizing and grouping his material. We shall come across it several times later on. We shall find that it brings to an end a section of his book. As you notice now in chapter 8, we go back to narrative incidents—the leper, then a man with a paralysis, and then a woman with a fever and so forth. Some teaching is involved, but it is very much interspersed with narrative incidents; and that goes through until the end of chapter 9. Then follows chapter 10, which is altogether given up to teaching, not incidents, including the commissioning and briefing that the Lord Jesus gave to his apostles before he sent them out on their missionary journeys. At the end of that passage of teaching, you come to 11:1, which says, 'When Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in their cities.' So here is this phrase again, 'when Jesus had finished' something or other.

Let's flick the pages now and notice how that reoccurs. Chapter 13, verse 53: 'And when Jesus had finished these parables, he went away from there'. Once more, if we just look back to chapter 11, there are incidents and some teaching intermingled. Likewise in chapter 12 there is some preaching and teaching intermingled with incidents. But when you come to chapter 13, you have a whole chapter devoted to nothing other than teaching—the famous seven parables of the kingdom. The pattern is repeating itself—'And when Jesus had finished these parables, he went away from there' (13:53). You hear the ringing of the bell as each class finishes and the bell goes off! Matthew is organizing his material.

Flick the pages again and come to 19:1–2: 'When Jesus had finished these sayings, he went away from Galilee and entered the region of Judea beyond the Jordan. And large crowds followed him, and he healed them there.' Same phrase again, 'when Jesus had finished'. And if we just look back to what he'd finished in chapter 18, we see it was a chapter full of teaching. In this group, incidents largely have prevailed in the earlier chapters, but it finishes once more with a block of teaching in chapter 18. Flick the pages once more and we come to 26:1: 'When Jesus had finished all these sayings . . . '.

We don't need to stay longer, therefore, to notice that Matthew is very carefully organizing his material for us. Now if we choose, we could make something different of it: it's open to us to do it. Say you go to buy packets of tea from the grocer: they're nicely organized, and the Chinese tea is kept in a separate packet from the ordinary Assam tea and the Indian tea. When you get them, it's open to you to mix them all together if you want to. Likewise the currants are displayed with the sultanas and with the self-raising flour; you may, if you choose, mix them all up and make a cake! That's perfectly legitimate, and you may decide that that's what you prefer to do with Matthew. He has neatly packaged his material, but you can undo the packages and use it as you will. Well, God bless you!

Dominant themes

However, we shall be enquiring this morning a little bit more deeply into what Matthew was doing. Was it simply to reduce the material to easily handled pieces, or could it be that in each of these particular parts there is a dominant theme or themes that Matthew himself is interested in? I'm going to take one of those sections now, and perhaps two others later, to suggest that there could be dominant themes that Matthew himself is concerned with. If there are, and we can see how he deals with the themes, we have some ready-made sermons—first to preach to ourselves and then, if need should require, to preach to other people.

A theme of 'authority'

Whereas these phrases—'when Jesus had finished these sayings', or 'these parables', or whatever—are all much the same, what follows is very often different on each occasion. It's wise therefore to listen to Matthew, prick up our ears and notice what he says next on each occasion. In 7:28–29 it is, 'when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.' So the multitudes were astonished at his teaching; and what in particular struck them was the authority with which the Lord Jesus spoke. Now if we take the hint from Matthew and look at the occasions upon which he repeats that word *authority* in this particular section of his Gospel, we come up with the following:

7:29: 'He was teaching them as one who had authority'.

8:9: (This is the centurion speaking to the Lord) 'For I too am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. And I say to one, "Go", and he goes and to another, "Come", and he comes, and to my servant, "Do this", and he does it.'

9:6: 'But that you may know that the Son of Man has . . .'—I'd better enquire of you, what do you read next in your Bibles?

AUDIENCE: 'Power'.

DWG: Power. Anybody got anything else?

AUDIENCE: 'Authority'.

DWG: Authority, you've got. Yes, you've got an expensive Bible I can see! It's got it right. It is true that the Greek word *eksousía* can mean *power* in some sense, but its basic meaning is *authority*, and it were better to keep it here: 'But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins'. It's not a question of power. You don't need power to forgive. You need authority. It's 'power' in the English sense that you might be empowered by your church or by your organization to represent them, meaning you can act in their name. Power in that sense then means authority—authority to act. 'That the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins'.

9:8: 'When the crowds saw it, they were afraid, and they glorified God, who had given such authority to men' (same word again).

10:1: 'And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority'.

Now you might well say, 'Isn't authority such a common word that you'd expect it to turn up anywhere at all in a Gospel like Matthew's?' Well, according to the concordance, this Greek word for authority occurs in this particular section five times. It doesn't occur again in Matthew until 21:23. It would seem therefore that this is no accident. Matthew is interested in authority. Is that to be expected? Is that reasonable? By common consent, Matthew is concerned to present our blessed Lord to us as King, and one of the things that mark out kings is that they have authority. Presently, the question will arise as to the nature of Christ's authority.

A theme of 'following'

But then if we go back to 8:1, we could pick up another dominant theme in this particular part of Matthew. Notice how the sweep of the narrative goes, starting at 7:28: 'When Jesus had finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching: for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes. When he came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him.' That is very natural, of course. If they were struck by his teaching, and particularly by the authority of that teaching, it is understandable that they would follow him.

Now with that come a number of references to this question of *following*. Let me read them out of the concordance for the sake of time.

8:1: 'Great crowds followed him'.

8:10: 'When Jesus heard this, he marvelled and said to those who followed . . .'

8:19: 'And a scribe came up and said to him, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go."'

8:22: 'Jesus said to him, "Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead."'

8:23: 'And when he got into the boat, his disciples followed him.'

9:9: 'As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him.'

9:19: A most unusual reversal of the situation, when Jairus came to ask that he come and heal his daughter—'And Jesus rose and followed him'.

9:27: ' . . . two blind men followed him'.

10:38: 'And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.'

So there is a tremendous outcrop of the occurrence of this particular verb in these three chapters. And again, if you were to use your concordance, you would see that later on in Matthew there's another section where 'following' becomes important, but this is one of the two sections in the book where following is particularly emphasized. Now that of course is not unnatural. If we put the two things together—on the one side, the Lord's authority and, on the other side, the reaction of people—teachers that can speak with some authority are going to get a following. If you have no authority, you won't get followed.

But you notice how Matthew in his Gospel starts off with the idea of following as simply a physical thing. When he walked down the mountainside and crowds followed him—they came along behind. So that's just a physical thing, following the Lord Jesus. By the time we reach the end, 'following' has become something very much deeper. In 10:38: 'Whoever does not take his cross and follow me' is not necessarily physical. It doesn't just mean following

Jesus Christ around from city to city. It's rather the verb that we would associate with discipleship: you follow the master.

It is no surprise then to find that it is in this section of Matthew that we have those famous verses in 8:18–23. There came people volunteering to follow the Lord Jesus and the question arises: in what sense do they mean it? Just follow him physically? But then on this occasion, you couldn't follow him physically without following him in the deeper sense. So here is Matthew and his job in his Gospel, as we all can see, is to present the Lord Jesus as King. That will inevitably raise the question of his authority, which leads straight on to the question of discipleship: they are two sides of the same coin. That Matthew presents our Lord as a King, we discover in the famous verses of chapter 11: 'Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you' (vv. 28–29).

The metaphor of yokes

That metaphor of taking a yoke is variously interpreted by the great preachers. Let me diverge for a moment and preach you a little sermon on yokes! How marvellous is the yoke of Christ. Do you know what a yoke is? A yoke is a bit of wood shaped so it goes over the necks of a couple of animals. In the ancient world, they didn't plough with horses but with bullocks and the yoke went on top of the neck of the bullocks. A horse has a harness that goes round him and he pulls by his chest, so you wouldn't put a yoke across a horse's neck. The yoke goes across the back of an ox and that's how he pulls the plough, or the threshing sledge or whatever.

Now here's me preaching this sermon about the yoke. It's a lovely yoke, because you take one side of it and the Lord takes the other; and he pulls and you pull. Isn't that a lovely combination? You never have to pull the thing by yourself. Is that what our Lord meant? I suppose it's open to preachers to say what they will about it, whether or not it is what our Lord meant. I wonder whether he was at that stage proposing himself to be under the yoke! Let's look how ancient kings talked about this, as for example in 1 Kings 12. This is the story of how, when Solomon died, his son Rehoboam was to come to the throne. All Israel came to Shechem to make him king and they put a request to their new king.

All the assembly of Israel came and said to Rehoboam, 'Your father made our yoke heavy. Now therefore lighten the hard service of your father and his heavy yoke on us, and we will serve you.' (1 Kgs 12:3–4)

When Solomon was king he had put a yoke upon the neck of the people. Does that mean that Solomon was in one half of the yoke and the people were in the other half? I doubt it! Solomon was not in the yoke: Solomon drove them. And if you want to keep the metaphor, Solomon was the farmer, the ploughman, the man with the reins in his hand. It was the people that were under the yoke, and the people here complain that Solomon made their yoke heavy, meaning his government was very oppressive. So the people have a proposition to put to King Rehoboam: 'Make the yoke lighter and we will serve you.' They're not saying, 'Please, Rehoboam, we're fed up carrying this yoke by ourselves. You come and join us and take our place inside the yoke.' No, they are saying 'Make the yoke lighter, make your

government less oppressive, and we will serve you.' Rehoboam took advice, first of all from the old men, and they said, 'Yes, Rehoboam, you'd be wise to listen to the people and make the yoke lighter and they will serve you.' Then he took counsel with the younger men and they said, 'Nonsense, you want to be tough. Make it ten thousand times harder.' And that's what Rehoboam decided, the silly chap. And when the people came the next day, he said, 'My little finger is thicker than my father's thighs... My father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions.' (vv. 10–11). The yoke is a symbol here of kingship. It's not the king under the yoke but the yoke is the government the king puts on the neck of the people.

'Come to me,' says Christ, 'and take my yoke upon you.' This is not an offer of a super deluxe course that is open to the really powerful amongst the believers: this is the first message of the Gospel. To be converted means to take the yoke of the King, his authority. When Matthew writes his Gospel, he has got his eye on you, because he supposes an evangelist to preach to you and get you converted, and he's preaching Christ as King, and he wants you to take the yoke of Christ.

We notice that when Jesus finished these sayings—his moral teaching of the Sermon on the Mount—the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes. And when he came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him.' Ladies and gentlemen, let me observe, you'll get nowhere with wishy-washy compromised teaching. The human heart in the end is looking for authority. I was in Jordan recently and had many conversations with Muslims of various kinds, mostly medical people because the friend I was staying with was a Christian doctor. One of these Muslim medics said to me, as he took me out to lunch to talk about Christianity, 'We don't know what to make of your archbishop. He's ambivalent in his attitude, in his sexual orientation. We can't stick that, not out here. We need to be told what's right and what is wrong.' So it was with the Lord Jesus: the crowds followed someone with authority.

The nature of Christ's authority

But what is the nature of that authority? In these delightful chapters, we shall see examples of our Lord exercising his authority. The first incident is that of a leper. 'A leper came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, if you will, you can make me clean." And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him saying, "I will; be clean." And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. And Jesus said to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone, and as for the priests, never mind them! They are a pretty useless lot, so don't go anywhere near them from now on. You don't need to.'" Is that what he said? I should think not. He said, 'Don't tell anybody, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a proof to them' (8:2–4, own trans.).

Does that seem a bit odd to you? All those ceremonial ablutions when people with certain skin diseases were cured and they had to go to the priest, who then had to go through all these sacrifices: two little birds and one of them killed over running water and the blood sprinkled upon the chap, and then the other living bird dipped into the water with the blood and then let go into the face of heaven at the beginning of the week. And then at

the end of the week, a whole gamut of sacrifices had to be offered. You say, 'Well hasn't that all been done away with? Didn't Christ come to do away with that kind of thing? Isn't that what the Epistle to the Hebrews says: all that ceremonial stuff is done for?' Well you're perfectly right. It's now done for. But it wasn't done for then. Christ hadn't died then and here was a man with this skin disease. We'll call it leprosy: it probably wasn't leprosy, but that's in our text so let's call it leprosy. It was the priest, under instructions from Moses, who was responsible before God to keep Israel clean. It would have been the priest who had examined the leper and pronounced him to be unclean and prescribed that he had to be separate from the community.

I wonder what your attitude to that would be? Narrow-mindedness or something, or exclusivism? Well in the end, it will come down to what you believe about the inspiration of the Old Testament and the authority of Moses. Our Lord obviously took Moses as authoritative, as the inspired word of God. The priests' duty, among other things, was to keep the nation clean. They had standards to maintain, not only of hygiene but ceremonial cleanness. And since the tabernacle and God's presence on earth were all hedged around by things physical, then people who were ceremonially unclean could not enter that holy place. They must be kept from it and they must also be kept from contaminating other people. Of course now, with the coming of the Son of God himself, there came something new. The priest could never cure a leper. He could pronounce him unclean and take the necessary prescribed precautions; but he couldn't cure him. If ever a man was cured, somehow or other, then he had to come to the priest to be ceremonially cleansed. The priest couldn't cleanse him.

What attitude would Christ take to this whole business of cleanness and uncleanness? He could do what the priest couldn't do, but he wasn't going to undercut the authority of that priest. The priest stood for cleanliness in the community and Christ's power to cleanse was not meant to undercut that priest's authority. Christ wasn't going to say, 'It doesn't matter whether you're a leper or not a leper. Silly old nonsense is Moses and all that stuff. That's bygone narrow-mindedness. Socially and ethically we're beyond that nowadays.' No, Christ would maintain the standards of cleanliness, but at the same time he would announce his presence and his power to save, his power to make people clean; and first to the priest. The man wasn't to go around talking elsewhere, he was to go to the priest. And what a message that was to the priest, because if the priest was all for cleanliness, he'd have to welcome Christ, wouldn't he? You can't be for cleanliness and against Christ. And what's more, when the leper turned up now cured, here was evidence in front of the priest's eyes that there had come a power far beyond anything the priest could do. I hope he didn't get jealous. Some do in those circumstances.

This was Christ advertising himself and advertising his authority. He had just preached the Sermon on the Mount with its tremendous standards of moral and spiritual cleanliness. Now with this leper, he gives the nation an example of his power to cleanse at this physical level and, of course, it becomes a parable of his power to cleanse at the higher level. What a gospel this is! We don't tell a homosexual that his homosexuality doesn't matter and that Jesus is so kind and loving that all kinds of immorality are okay. We must maintain the standards of the law like Christ maintained them, but what a message that, in Christ, there

has come one who does not merely say, 'Be clean,' but one who can make you clean. What authority! The fact that he has the authority is a glorious, gospel message. He not merely taught them as one that had authority, but he demonstrated that authority. That is the gospel.

Similarly, with the next story. He entered into Capernaum and a centurion came appealing to him to heal his servant who was lying paralysed at home, suffering terribly. Our Lord said, 'I will come and heal him,' and the centurion replied, 'Lord, I'm not worthy that you should come under my roof, but only say the word and my servant will be healed. For I too am a man under authority and I say to this one, "Go", and he goes, and to another, "Come", and he comes, and to this man, "Do this", and he does it' (8:8-9). Yes, the centurion was a man under authority. His authority was a little bit limited, I must confess. There was one chap in his house, grievously sick of the paralysis and the centurion could have stood there all day long and said, 'Go there', and, 'Come here', and, 'Do this and do the other', and the chap couldn't. Nothing wrong with the centurion's command, but the poor chap couldn't carry it out anyway. Oh, rejoice in the authority of our blessed Lord. He not only has the authority to command, but the power and authority to give us the strength to do the command. This is the gospel—authority in action. But to take the details of the story as they come: 'And when Jesus heard it, he marvelled and said to those who followed him, "Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith."' So the story of the centurion is illustrative of our Lord's authority.

Verses 14-17: 'And when Jesus entered Peter's house, he saw his mother-in-law lying sick with a fever. He touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she rose and began to serve him.' The contrast is between her fevered state, when she couldn't serve anybody, not even her illustrious guest; and being a good lady and the senior woman in the house, she would have been very distressed at being unable to serve the eminent guest that was now in her house. What a gracious touch that was, literally. He didn't just say, 'Get up, woman', but he touched her hand and the fever went. This is the blessed Lord, whose authority can calm the fevers that so disable us and stop us from serving, and raise us up to serve again.

This is followed by delightful verses that tell us 'they brought to him many who were oppressed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick. This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: "He took our illnesses and bore our diseases"' (8:16-17). Now these verses have been the topic of some discussion and dispute. Sometimes the claim is made that these verses are telling us that physical healing is in the atonement, because this is a verse that is cited from Isaiah the prophet. But it cannot be here referring to the atonement, because the atonement hadn't yet been made. This is in the course of our Lord's earthly life and he's carrying their sorrows in what sense? Well you see him coming alongside people, not just telling them how to behave as he did in the Sermon on the Mount, but putting his almighty shoulder, so to speak, under their burdens, and carrying them.

But let's see how the story carries on. It takes a change, like a train going over the points just outside the station, and you can hear it's changing direction by the clatter, the different sound the wheels make as they go over the points. Hitherto, Matthew has been collecting stories that illustrate our Lord's authority that can banish the uncleanness, that can empower

the paralytic, that can restore the fevered to their ministry. This is all gospel. This is what Christ does. This, if you like to say, is the easy side of the gospel.

The cost of discipleship

There now comes a change. 'Now when Jesus saw a crowd around him, he gave orders to go over to the other side' (8:18). How very odd. I thought a preacher's job was to be popular and collect the crowds, and the more crowds the better. Didn't it begin by saying, 'He taught with such authority that when he came down from the mountain, the crowds followed him'? Well surely that's congratulation. Don't you build on that initial success and get even more crowds? What was our Lord doing, running off when he saw the crowds? Very odd.

Well let's notice what happened. The crowd had been following, physically following, and interested—like the children ran after the Pied Piper. But if that following is to be turned into real discipleship, there comes a point when our Lord will have to leave the crowds and see who is prepared now to follow him wherever he leads. So now what you're going to get are those who come to follow, and very strict and very challenging conditions are laid down on what it means to be a follower and how the Lord's authority affects the matter of following and discipleship.

'Now when Jesus saw a crowd around him, he gave orders to go over to the other side. And a scribe came up and said to him, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.'" It was a marvellous profession of willingness to be a disciple; and our Lord pointed out the difficulties: 'Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head' (8:20). Are you prepared for it? I don't need to preach you a sermon. You've doubtless preached it in your courses on discipleship many a time. You're the experts on it. All I point out now is how the theme of authority on the one side, and our following as disciples, is being developed. Here the train crosses the points. To be of any use, they who accept the gospel are simultaneously expected to prepare themselves for a life of discipleship—of following, and these are its costs.

Similarly there was a man who said to him, "'Lord, let me first go and bury my father.'" And Jesus said to him, "Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead'" (vv. 21–22). He must be first. You don't come to the Lord and say, 'Lord, I'll follow you, but first . . . '.

I remember sitting in a home in Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia once and my host, who was a Christian man, had invited quite an eminent Chinese businessman, if somehow the Lord would lead it so that I could talk to him. So the man came—a very polite Chinese man, as all Chinese are—and he presently explained to me that he'd like to become a Christian, but he couldn't yet because his elder brother was still living. He then explained, 'You see in our society we have to consider not only what our parents say, but our first brother number one [that is, the eldest brother]. We must always consult him in everything we do.' That was true of their culture—it's breaking down now but it was true, particularly in Malaysia, at that stage. Elder brother number one was an authority almost equal to the parents, if not sometimes more, and no junior member of the household must take any decision—small ones like getting married or big ones like going into business, or anything at all—without consulting elder brother number one. You didn't ever call him by his first name: that would

be the height of rudeness for any lesser member of the family to call elder brother number one by his personal name, and you must bow to what he said. 'I can't become a Christian,' he said, 'until my elder brother dies.'

In our culture people are perhaps not so outspoken, yet they have their own priorities. But for us there can be no higher priorities, and this isn't a second layer of Christianity. There isn't a gospel that says that Christ can take your burdens and you're free to do as you like, but if you would like to engage in the advanced course, you could become a disciple. If we don't see that Christ has authority and we must follow him first—that there's no other higher authority—then we haven't seen our need of salvation. Christ isn't a tradesman come to repair your dishwasher, but then next week if you found you'd got a better offer from the electrical supply company when it came to fixing the washing machine, you'd get another man in to do it. He is sovereign Lord and here's the course that was set for them: they must be prepared to commit themselves to him and to this flimsy boat, to go across the sea (see vv. 23–27). Here's the journey story and the lesson he gave in the journey that proclaims him master of the physical elements of the universe.

Christ's authority in the physical realm

We mustn't interpret this story to mean that no believer will ever be drowned. I remember being at the Lord's Supper years and years ago and some good brother that morning had given a great sermon on the storm on the lake and how the apostles were greatly afraid, and our Lord had rebuked the storm. 'The boat didn't go down,' said he, and he sat down. After the end of the session, a stranger got up and he said, 'I have to tell you, my dear brothers and sisters, sometimes the boat does go down. I have just received news that my five missionary colleagues have been killed by the Auca Indians.'

The story isn't there to tell us that no Christian will ever be lost at sea, never die in an aeroplane crash, never be involved in a car accident or something. What is it there to tell us? That the boat wouldn't go down because Christ happened to be taking a nap and wasn't aware of what was happening? If it goes down, it will go down with his full knowledge, because he permits it. But it does mean us waking up to see who he is, so that we might have personal experience of the authority of Christ and come to believe it in our hearts that the Lord we serve is the Lord and master of the universe, Lord of all the physical powers. And we follow him on the great journey in which he leads us from this little old world out into a place of such vast dimensions that are magnificent to contemplate. We need not fear the principalities, powers, mights and dominions, height, depth and any other creature—he is Lord of them all.

Christ's authority in the spiritual realm

The story that follows is his authority over the spirit realm and, again, I don't propose to preach you a sermon. You've preached it many times. What I'm developing is the notion that Matthew is collating these incidents very deliberately. These chapters are about our Lord's authority and the converts are accepting that authority and following him. The initial things were his power to cleanse the leper, give power to the paralysed, strengthen the

fevered and so forth, and bearing our sicknesses and putting his shoulder under the weight of our burden.

But now this is the next part of the course of discipleship and the lessons to be learnt we can only learn on the path of discipleship. It is one thing to sit in the study room on very comfortable sofas and theorize about the fact that the Lord is Lord of the universe. It's another thing in life, as we follow his commands, to find ourselves up against the hostile powers of the universe. It's lovely to talk about God as the God of the flowers, the God of beauty, and the little lambs being born. But it's a hostile universe, and he is Lord of it. We only learn that on the path of discipleship when we are actually involved.

Now notice this: 'When he came to the other side, to the country of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men met him, coming out of the tombs'—and then Matthew makes a comment that nobody else makes—'so fierce that no one could pass that way' (8:28). The very devil's agents, there to stop this path of discipleship going any further. Our Lord dealt with the demons and cast them out and made a way through, satanic opposition notwithstanding. But now notice a heart-chilling thing:

The herdsmen fled, and going into the city they told everything, especially what had happened to the demon-possessed men. And behold, all the city came out to meet Jesus, and when they saw him, they begged him to leave their region. And getting into a boat he crossed over . . . (8:33–9:1)

Really? The Lord that can command the physical elements of the universe, the Lord before whom demons have to flee, but when human beings say to him, 'Go', he goes. Really? Can a human being say, 'No', to God Almighty? Well, yes. God is no tyrant. The awesome thing of being a human with a free will is you can say to God, 'Go'; and hence the doctrine of eternal punishment.

Christ's authority to forgive sins

With that, in chapter 9, we're going to cross the points again when our Lord comes back after the journey. Now we come back to illustrations of what I call the easy side of discipleship, for there is the case once more of a paralytic. It demonstrates the Lord's authority. The first thing he says to this paralysed man is, 'Your sins are forgiven.' The scribes objected and said within themselves, 'This man is blaspheming' (vv. 2–3). That should alert us to what the situation actually is in this room. If Jesus had said, 'Be of good cheer, my son, God will one day forgive you', the scribes would have had no objection. 'I'm sure God will be merciful to you in the end, old fellow.' Well they would have had no objection to that. They hoped that themselves. But here was a man—and, as far as they could see, no more than a man—saying, 'Your sins are forgiven.'

What on earth authority did he think he had? In their mind, he was usurping the authority of God to forgive and, what is more, not waiting until the final judgment, but delivering the verdict now, here on earth. That is in fact what our Lord was claiming. That you may know that the Son of Man has power, has authority, on earth—not merely at the final judgment, but on earth—to forgive sins, and to tell people their sins are forgiven. That

was the demonstration: that he has authority to forgive. But that authority to forgive being questioned, our Lord now demonstrates that it is real by giving the man strength to walk.

And we're back to this question of testimony. When he cured the leper, he sent him to the priests. Now when he cures the paralytic, he makes him an exhibition to the theologians, that is, the scribes. To understand the Gospels in their finer points, we must picture in our minds the difference between the priests on the one hand and the scribes on the other. Priests weren't normally scribes and scribes weren't normally priests. Priests were the fellows that had to do with the sacrifice and the temple and the incense, and chanting the prayers, and the services in the temple, and that kind of thing.

The scribes were the students of Scripture. They were the theologians. Very few of them were academics. They could have been butchers or grocers or candlestick makers, but they were serious students of Scripture and became authorities in Scripture, as distinct from ritual and ceremony. So now, whereas the leper was sent to the priests, who had concern about cleanliness and ceremonial cleanliness and so forth, the paralysed man is made an exhibition to the theologians, and this is a very important thing. Our Lord's authority to forgive sins seemed to the scribes blasphemous, but it is shown to be genuine, and demonstrated to the theologians to be genuine, by imparting to the man the ability to get up and walk.

If you transpose that to the argument of the Epistle to the Romans—the question of forgiveness and justification by faith that Paul deals with in chapters 3 and 4 and the first bit of 5—these chapters tell us that we can be forgiven and justified and have peace with God, and have it here and now, and have it on earth, and be utterly sure of it. Now it's no secret that that upsets a lot of theologians, for they say, 'If you can be sure of forgiveness and justification like that, here on earth, and you're saved by faith as you call it, you could go out and live as you like. Your doctrine must be wrong.' The answer to that is not to say, 'I didn't mean you could be sure of salvation here on earth.' The answer is, 'But this works.' Says Paul, 'I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation' (Rom 1:16). It works. And those chapters in Romans which tell us how we may be justified, forgiven, absolutely by faith and not by works, are followed by an exposition of God's power that enables those who are forgiven, to walk. We need to be able to demonstrate that still. The authority of Christ is not only to forgive, but to empower us to walk straight.

Matthew's own experience

Look now at verse 9. Here is one verse which people have likened to a great painter who paints a vast picture and puts his signature at the bottom. This is Matthew, putting his signature to his book. Delightful, isn't it?

As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, 'Follow me.' And he rose and followed him. (9:9)

The command to 'follow' is obviously a conversion word. This is not some second stage Christianity. This day, Matthew was converted from his tax gathering. Now tax gatherers, as you know, were a dubious crowd. Not that there was anything wrong in the government

exacting taxes of its citizens. They all have a way to exact too much; I know, I'm sympathetic with you! But governments have a right and a need to exact taxes. Why the Jewish tax collectors were so hated was that they were working for the imperialists, who were the oppressors, so they were hated by people who longed for political independence.

But more than that, the tax collectors took more from the people than they were entitled to, and thus oppressed the people and got themselves very rich. They were hated for their extortion and yet there were some men like Zacchaeus and Matthew who were so engrossed in making money that they were prepared to put up with the social hatred that came their way. They were excluded from the synagogue because of their anti-social behaviour. What will Christ do with his message of forgiveness? Will he say, 'You're forgiven and you can carry on extorting'? Well no, indeed not. But this wonderful story, according to Matthew giving his personal testimony in this one verse, when the Lord came by and said, 'Follow me,' shows that that command brought with it a power which broke the chains of the love of money; and Matthew got up and left it. That would be necessary, wouldn't it? The Christian gospel doesn't say there is forgiveness and you can carry on cheating.

Matthew's Gospel

Further Major Themes

What I have tried to establish in the first part this morning is that Matthew has very carefully arranged his Gospel material into certain packets, so to speak, and we've been investigating one of them. We followed two of the words that occurred at the very beginning: the Lord's *authority* and the corollary of that, 'the multitudes *followed* him'. We were trying to establish therefore that this is one of Matthew's major themes—the authority of the Lord as King and teacher, to which we respond, if we respond rightly, by following him. Then we took examples of how that authority works on his side, what he can do with his authority; and then the requirements he will make of those that follow him as his disciples, and the lessons he put them through. Thirdly, we made the point that Matthew alternates his collection of material. That is, he will stress on this occasion what the Lord can do, then he will lay down the demands that the Lord makes.

Now I mustn't give way to my weakness. Some people have a besetting weakness, I have half a dozen besetting weaknesses, but one of them is to preach when I shouldn't be and that's a veritable sin! I'm not meant to be preaching to you this morning, but sharing some ideas with you so that if you found them useful, you could use and develop them. I therefore propose to say rather little more about this particular section.

Discipleship and its critics

I have said enough to sketch in which subjects I think this section is dealing with. I want to pass on to another couple of sections, so that I can give some idea of the scope of themes that are dealt with by Matthew in his Gospel. But just let's notice now how chapter 9, from verse 10 onward, still continues this theme of our Lord's authority and of our reaction by following him in true discipleship. Verse 10 gives us the criticism from the Pharisees and, from verses 14 onwards, the questionings that came from the disciples of John.

Our Lord, having demonstrated his authority to forgive and his authority to break the love of money in Matthew, now is criticized by the Pharisees that his disciplines are not strict enough. Many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Jesus and his disciples, and when the Pharisees saw it, they said to his disciples, 'Why does your teacher eat with the tax collectors and sinners?' (v. 11). In other words they're saying, 'This cheap gospel of his. He goes around announcing that he has authority to forgive people and he forgives people their sins and they can know it. Look at his behaviour. We wouldn't let people like that in the synagogue and here he is, breaking the discipline of the synagogue by

eating with tax collectors and sinners. That's cheap religion that is, undermining the standards of the synagogue. We have disciplined those people because of their outrageous, anti-social and anti-moral behaviour and he goes amongst them, preaching this forgiveness. He can forgive people and welcome them to his table fellowship. This is pseudo religion.'

Our Lord's answer to it was, 'Healthy people don't need a doctor, but sick people do' (v. 12, own trans.). That is a powerful argument, isn't it? In the days before smallpox was eradicated, if people had the disease they were put in quarantine and kept away from everybody else. But if the doctor didn't go to them, they would die. Would you suppose the doctor is compromising his profession by visiting a smallpox patient; that the doctor is on the side of smallpox if he goes anywhere near a smallpox patient? Of course the patient must be isolated so he doesn't infect the rest, but the doctor is not compromising with smallpox by visiting the patient. 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.' And the doctor must go where the sick people are. He is not compromising.

If you'd attended that house party with Matthew and people like him—Matthew has more Christian grace than to tell you it was he who put on the big party—and you had gone in there with all the Rolls-Royces and Jaguars parked outside; the people outside would have been saying, 'All those spivs and mafia types, they've made huge sums of money, and this Jesus is going there, hobnobbing with them. I reckon he expects his pockets to be lined when he comes out, and it's all in the name of religion.' But if you'd attended the party, you and everybody else present would have gathered why the Lord was there. Look at the advertisement Matthew was. He was once a tax gatherer. He'd left it. This is the doctor at work. He's not letting the side down. He's not compromising with sin.

The question the disciples of John raised is a somewhat different sort, not to be confused. John's disciples, as well as John himself, were very serious minded people. John believed in evangelism of a kind: he preached repentance to prepare people for forgiveness of sins. John certainly didn't go soft on sin, but his disciples had a bit of a problem. Christ didn't make his disciples fast. John did, and therefore John's disciples, very politely, suggested that perhaps Christ was a bit too easy on his disciples, not rigorous enough. 'You'll produce very flabby troops if you go on like that.' What answer did our Lord have to that? 'Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them?' That would be daft, wouldn't it, to be invited by the bridegroom as a special friend to go to his wedding, and not partake of the food because you're fasting? The fast would be inappropriate to the occasion and inappropriate to the presence of the bridegroom and the joy associated therewith. For fasting to be valid it has got to make sense and be appropriate. There's no sense just in doing it for its own sake. Days will come when the bridegroom is taken away. They'll fast then. Yes, discipline must be appropriate to the occasion.

'No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment . . . Neither is new wine put into old wineskins. If it is, the skins burst and the wine is spilled' (9:16–17). For time's sake, let me deal with the second of those. In the ancient world, as you know, you didn't have glass bottles for wine. You had leather bottles and you didn't put new wine into old bottles because the old bottles, being leather, would have become hard. With a new wine inside fermenting, the new wine would split the bottle and you would lose both the bottle and the wine. You can't have wine without bottles. Our Lord isn't for doing away with bottles

completely, but the bottle must be a new bottle to cope with the new wine, because a new bottle, being new leather, will have some give and yet still hold the wine.

These were the first converts of Christianity. The old rules and regulations of Judaism were very good, given by God, but they'd got rather hard and unyielding down the centuries. Besides, those bottles of Judaism had never been designed to cope with the joy of folks who had found the Saviour and had been forgiven and had found the power of Christ in their lives. The old bottles of Judaism couldn't cope with that, and you must have a discipline that's appropriate to the new wine. Yes, it would settle down afterwards, and some of us who have been Christians a long while, we're pretty hard bottles! Well, not you, but some of the rest of us! You must have discipline: you can't have wine without any bottles, but discipline must be appropriate to the stage of the wine. Common sense analogies from nature and from daily life—this is our Lord justifying the principles that he lays down for his discipline of his disciples.

Physical miracles with spiritual analogy

Then there came a lot of other people. Jairus came to the Lord. He was ruler of the synagogue, but in his house a child was dead. Our Lord did a literal physical miracle and raised her from the dead. But just as in all cases in the New Testament, the physical miracles have a spiritual lesson to tell us. If we apply that rule here, what a situation it is. Ruler of the synagogue, responsible for its service, but his daughter is dead. He comes to bring the Lord into the situation and the Lord grants a revivification of the dead daughter. And then there followed him two blind men and they haven't got any sight, and they want sight, and they keep following the Lord until he gives them the sight—the further reaches of discipleship.

There are synagogues still, of various kinds, Jewish and Christian, and they've got rather a lot of dead people in them. Can the Lord bring new life? And there are dear folks who follow the Saviour, but their trouble is their eyes haven't been opened. They can't see anything. Hand them a bit of Scripture, it means nothing to them. They don't see anything in it. More than that, of course, we can be like that ourselves as believers. We still need to be prayed for and to pray ourselves that the eyes of our hearts will be enlightened, that we may know. That is the ongoing work of the Lord, constantly and evermore to open the eyes of our hearts (see Eph 1:18).

The two blind men, realizing their blindness, followed the Lord. He didn't at once answer their prayer, you'll notice. He kept them following and following; and you get the impression they got their gift of sight because of their faith, their faith being expressed in the fact that they kept on following and wouldn't give up until the Lord had granted them sight. And at this level of discipleship that is the fact. If we are to have our eyes opened—as Ephesians 1 talks about, 'the eyes of your heart being enlightened'—we'll have to keep on praying it to the end of our days. In that sense, it depends on our faith and our faith is expressed by the fact that we keep following and crying out to the Lord for it. We shall never say, 'You've done enough now, Lord'—not until we get home to glory; and it's doubtful even then if we shall say it's enough!

Commissioning the disciples

So we have seen in this section the dominant themes of our Lord's authority and the obverse of that, our following him and what that means. But this is a course in discipleship through all its various stages, and with that demonstrated, the disciples were sent out on their evangelism. That was a wise sort of thing, wasn't it? Chapter 10 summarizes the various instructions that our Lord gave: he may have given some of them at different times, but Matthew summarizes them here.

Notice verse 1: 'He called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority', delegated authority, as they went out on their evangelism. And some of what he said was weighty. Look for instance at verses 14–15: 'And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town. Truly, I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgement for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town.'

Yes, as he sent them out, he gave them authority; and what is more, he made them aware that when they went out to preach, they were preaching against the backdrop of eternity and of the final judgment. He doesn't simply say, 'If anyone will not receive me, or listen to my words', but, 'If anyone will not receive *you* or listen to *your* words'. Not because the disciples had any inherent authority in themselves; it was because they were sent by the Lord and the words they preached were Christ's words. Upon those words and people's reaction to them, their very eternal destiny would depend. The gospel preacher gets up and the words he actually says, because they are words Christ has given him to speak, if folks hear those words and receive them, they will be saved. If they hear those words and reject them, they could be lost forever.

It's a solemn thing. You just imagine someone arriving before the great white throne and our Lord, to whom is committed judgment, brings them before him and they're condemned for not believing the gospel—their name is not in the Book of Life. And the man says, 'Whenever did I hear the gospel?' and the Lord says, 'This preacher here, you heard him preach at such and such a time, and as he preached, in your heart you knew, didn't you?' To have delegated authority like that is an enormous responsibility.

I've said enough and I must give up the preaching! Let's turn now to the next section and see if there are other dominant themes and what they might be. Watching the dominant themes and noticing how they are developed in each section is a very profitable thing. It opens up a Gospel to us. So look at 11:1, in which there is another of the great division markers: 'When Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in their cities.'

Teaching and preaching

Now that section goes on until you come to 13:53, which says: 'When Jesus had finished these parables, he went away from there'. So this is the section—from the beginning of chapter 11 to almost the end of chapter 13—which we shall be looking at to see if there are any dominant themes. Let's do what we did the first time—look at that introductory phrase to see if we get any hint of what the prominent theme would be.

When Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in their cities. (11:1)

You say, 'The Lord was forever preaching and teaching. That is a very general statement, surely, not a dominant theme.' Well it is though, because if you care to look ahead to chapter 13, the section is nothing but teaching. But now look at the special thing that stares us in the face at the beginning of chapter 13, when he spoke his first parable:

And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: 'A sower went out to sow . . .'. (vv. 2-3)

That tremendous parable is a parable about preaching. Here is our Lord talking about his own ministry. In fact you will find he's justifying it, and the great parable is about the importance and the effect of preaching and the necessity for preaching, and the results that accrue from preaching.

So 11:1 is not merely saying that our Lord preached and taught, but what he taught in this section is going to be about teaching and the importance of teaching. It is going to address our minds to the fact that our Lord's technique for setting up the kingdom of God on earth is by preaching and teaching. We can take that immediately as an important lesson. Sometimes one thinks that in the modern church we've got afraid of preaching and teaching: we think that the church is established better by other means. Well preaching and teaching is not the only means, but listen to our Lord on preaching and teaching. It is the way *par excellence* of setting up the kingdom. It will take some faith to believe it and then to practice it.

Sometimes I fear that we've lost our nerve. 'All Scripture is breathed out by God' (2 Tim 3:16). We'd go to the stake for it: we believe absolutely in the inspiration of Scripture. 'And [is] profitable for teaching'? Not Chronicles, surely, and Leviticus is doubtful: you couldn't expect anybody to listen to that—you'd drive everybody away! Yes, we would go to the stake for the fact that it's inspired, but whether all of it is profitable and should be preached . . . ? Anyway, this is our Lord. He not only preached and he taught, but he preached about preaching; and what led him to do that, and what is the situation? Well let's notice the first story that follows the introductory remark.

John the Baptist and the problem of evil

Now when John heard in the prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, 'Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?' (11:2-3)

There have been many who rushed to the defence of John the Baptist. They say beware how you interpret his question. Superficially, it might seem to suggest that John the Baptist was having some doubts about whether Jesus was the Messiah, and they say that it is impossible to think that he had any such doubts. He was the forerunner, prophesied of in Isaiah—the

voice crying in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way of the LORD' (40:3). In some sense, he was also the fulfilment of Malachi, 'I will send Elijah' (4:5). How could such a God-sent, God-anointed, great forerunner of the Messiah ever have any doubts about whether Jesus was the Messiah? 'That's impossible to believe,' they say, 'he didn't have any doubts.'

Well John did say, 'Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?' People say, 'The trouble is this, John was in prison and he was expecting the Lord to come and set up his kingdom. He had no doubts that Jesus was going to set the kingdom up. It was just that he wasn't getting on with the job very quickly. There was this Herod who had put John the Baptist in prison. He was surely a candidate for the judgment of the Messiah, and the Lord wasn't getting on with that fast enough. In fact, when he healed some people, he told them not to say anything to anybody. It was a little bit odd. So John saw a way of just giving the Lord a gentle nudge to get on with the job. He'd wait until the Lord had got a great crowd around him; he'd send a messenger or two to pop the question in the hearing of all the people, "Are you really the Messiah?" That would make the Lord admit it, and that would settle the question.'

If you feel you need to give the Lord a nudge and he's not doing things as quickly as he should, isn't that a doubt? Yes, the situation of course was serious. Here was John the Baptist and he'd come proclaiming that Jesus was the Messiah and he called upon the people to repent, to get ready for the Messiah who could forgive their sins. He said the kingdom of heaven was at hand and they'd better start, because it was very near. He said, in fact, 'Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees' (Matt 3:10). If you're walking through the park and you come across a tree and there's an axe with the metal against the root of the tree, you can see what the gardener is intending to do. He's going to cut the tree down: the axe is laid to the root of the tree. The Messiah has come. He is going to gather the wheat into his barn. 'He will clear his threshing floor' — another great metaphor for judgment — 'and the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire' (v. 12).

That's what the Messiah was going to do. And John, preparing for the Messiah to come and do that, turned around and caught sight of Herod, who had taken his brother's wife, to the scandal of everybody. He put his prophetic fist in Herod's face and said, 'Do you know who I am? I'm the forerunner of Messiah and Messiah has come. I call on you publicly to get rid of that woman and repent.' Salome didn't like that, and she got John put in prison. Well it wasn't that he was in prison for speeding on his way to an evangelical meeting. Nothing like that. He was in prison for what lay at the very heart of his message and, as he understood it, the message of the Messiah. The Messiah had come, among other things, to bring down the judgment of God upon unrepentant sinners. And in the name of the coming Messiah, he had told Herod to repent or God would cut him down; and now John was in prison.

What must Christ do now then? You say, 'He'll have to come and get John out of prison. If he doesn't act now the whole public will see through it. There's nothing in this whole business of the Messiah if he doesn't deal with Herod now and cut him down, and get John out of prison.' To have Herod defy the Messiah's forerunner and carry on sinning and get away with it, in John's estimation that denied everything he'd preached about the Messiah. So John was in prison, expecting the Messiah to come any minute, deal with Herod and get

him out. There came some footsteps down the prison passage. 'It's the Messiah coming.' No, it was the jailer with his bread and water, and the Messiah didn't come that day; and he didn't come the next day, so John sent some messengers to ask him, 'Are you really the Messiah that we were looking for, or have we got to look for another?' But the Lord still didn't come. He sent a message to John; he didn't come himself. As the next section will tell you, there came some footsteps. 'Ah, this is the Messiah, coming down the passage to let me out.' But when the door was opened, it was a man with a sword, and the sword flashed and John's head fell, and was taken to the riotous banquet—the triumph of Herod's supposed wife over this prophet and the word and the preaching of John.

Tell me, where was Messiah, and what's the good of his going round preaching and teaching, if he doesn't deal with situations like this? How is this setting up the kingdom of God? Ladies and gentlemen, Matthew isn't afraid to tell you this, because if he's going to preach to you that Jesus is the Son of God and the Messiah, then people will want to know. They wanted to know it in John's day; they want to know it even more nowadays. How can you say Jesus is the Messiah when he does not put down evil; the problem of evil, in other words? And the problem goes further. How can you say there's a God Almighty in heaven if he doesn't put down evil? We ask if it is likely that Matthew would raise any such question. Are we on the right track? Is it true to life? Of course it's true to life. If you're going to get up and preach that Jesus is the Messiah and there's a God of justice in heaven, sooner or later somebody's going to ask you and you'll have to answer it: 'Then why doesn't he put down evil?' Has Matthew any answer? Has Christ any answer? What is the answer?

I want to call attention to what is a very tiny word, but it is at the heart of one of the answers.

He went on from there and entered their synagogue. And a man was there with a withered hand. And they asked him, 'Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?'—so that they might accuse him. He said to them, 'Which one of you who has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.' Then he said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' And the man stretched it out, and it was restored, healthy like the other. But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him. (12:9–14)

So here we find the opposition, not out in the world amongst the scurrilous sinners, but right in the synagogue itself, in the place where God was worshipped. Here the opposition comes to a head—when Christ heals this man, they plot to destroy him, determine to destroy him. This is pure, unadulterated evil and Christ said, 'You evil men. You've gone too far this time', and he lifted up his rod like Moses and struck them dead . . . did he? No, he didn't. 'Jesus, aware of this, withdrew from there' (v. 15). Withdrew!

What kind of a Messiah is it who, in the face of evil, would withdraw? Well, we have to be careful. We've so long revered Matthew as an inspired writer and believed every word he said. Imagine the Jews of the first century who got hold of this Gospel of Matthew and he's advertising the Messiah as a Messiah who, in the face of evil, withdraws. How will he defend a Messiah like that? Well here is Matthew's first answer.

And many followed him, and he healed them all and ordered them not to make him known. This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: ‘Behold, my servant whom I have chosen; my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. He will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets; a bruised reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory.’ (12:15–20)

The merciful ‘until’

Did you notice that *until*? It’s Matthew telling you that Messiah is not weak-kneed in the face of evil—giving up, running away with a few bedraggled disciples in some holy huddle, not facing the question of evil. The Messiah is acting precisely as God, through Isaiah the prophet, said he would act. ‘He will not quarrel or cry aloud . . . a bruised reed he will not break, a smouldering wick he will not quench, *until* . . .’. There is a timetable in the divine programme and our Lord is adhering to that timetable, as we will see as we look at the ‘parables of the kingdom’ in the next section.

First there comes a great parable of preaching in 13:3–23, and then comes the second of the parables.

He put another parable before them, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven can be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, “Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?” He said to them, “An enemy has done this.” So the servants said to him, “Then do you want us to go and gather them?” But he said, “No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. Let both grow together *until* the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.”’ (13:24–30)

The exposition of that is given us later on by the Lord himself:

The enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the close of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the close of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be the weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear. (13:39–43)

Our Lord then was not running away. Says Matthew, he is fulfilling the strategy and the tactics laid down by God through Isaiah. ‘He will not cause his voice to be heard or break the bruised reed, and so forth, *until* . . .’. The parable of weeds and wheat is saying the same thing. Pluck up the weeds now? No, wait until harvest. The Messiah had no intention, at his first coming, to exercise the judgment of God and cut down evil. That is not his answer to

the problem of evil. When will Messiah cut down evil men? Here he tells you straight—at the end of the age and not until then. That is the Christian position, ladies and gentlemen. We're not talking about God Almighty and his providential government of this earth. That's another thing completely. We're talking about Messiah and what Messiah was sent to do, and what the programme for Messiah is.

Said Daniel, 'God rules in the kingdom of men' (4:17), and if Nebuchadnezzar gets uppish, God cuts him down to size. But you mustn't confuse that kingdom of God and God's providential government of the world with Messiah's mission. The mission of Messiah in the world was not to execute the judgment of God at his first coming. He will not execute the judgment of God on sinners until the end of the age. That is an exceedingly important thing to get hold of. In the course of the centuries, the church forgot it—hence the *Crusades* and many other such things in the name of Jesus, taking out the armies to put down evil. What a scandal it has been.

You say, 'Is this credible? Can you believe in a Messiah who would come into our world and not put down evil? What use is a Messiah like that?' A fellow student of mine, who was a Jew whose parents were destroyed by Hitler in the gas camps, I remember him vividly saying to me, 'But, David, your Jesus cannot be the Messiah. The Old Testament said that when the Messiah came he would put down evil, and your Jesus has done no such thing. And don't you start talking about him setting up a spiritual kingdom. That's a little notion that you Christians invented when you were disappointed that Jesus didn't set up a literal kingdom. But that won't wash: the Old Testament talked of Messiah coming and pouring out the wrath of God on the heads of the bombers.' Try and tell the Prime Minister of Israel at this present moment that Jesus is Messiah, the Jewish Messiah, doing nothing about the bombers. Try and tell a Jew that Jesus is Messiah and yet he didn't do anything about Hitler either.

Matthew is writing for Jews, isn't he? This is a question that Matthew has got to answer if his Gospel is going to be credible. If I had had the sense to know it, I would have said to my Jewish friend, 'Wait a minute, old chap, according to Psalm 110—written by your famous King David—the programme for Messiah was this, "The LORD says to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.'" That was the programme: Messiah was to be invited by God and elevated to sit at the right hand of God. There would then be an interval 'until' his enemies were made his footstool. That was the programme, and you'll find the early Christians talking about this in almost all the epistles, quoting Psalm 110:1. It was vital for the early Christians and their testimony, particularly to the Jews, that this period—the 'until' period—was foretold in Scripture, and things are going to plan: Christ to be elevated by the ascension to the right hand of God and there to be seated 'until' God will give the command and Messiah will come, and his enemies will be made his footstool.

Why the 'until'? Our Lord tells us in chapter 13 what his tactics are going to be, and how he will establish the kingdom of God. Not first by brandishing a sword and cutting the heads off the ungodly and consigning them to perdition. 'The kingdom of God is going to be established,' says Christ, 'by preaching.' That's the importance of preaching. Here is Messiah on his own methods to establish his kingdom. 'A sower went out to sow', with the various

results that attend the preaching; and he through his servants will go on sowing the seed until the day comes for the harvest. If you think about it, it is realistic. Some people have a very naïve idea of how you would cure the problems of the world. What you would do is simply gather all the baddies in one group and all the goodies in the other group; and then you would get a sword and cut the heads off all the baddies and you'd be left with the goodies. Marvellously effective, except there's a difficulty in deciding who the goodies are. If Christ had come to execute the judgment of God, how many heads would have been left on their shoulders? And if he did it now? That is a naïve notion of how to establish the kingdom of Messiah. That is not to deny judgment. Judgment will one day come, but if God is going to save anybody—and he starts from the premise that all have sinned—then God in his mercy offers a time of salvation 'until' . . . That is the programme that Isaiah outlined. That is the programme that Jesus enunciated.

There's a lot more in that section, but I'm not going to develop it. All I'm concentrating on is the first big issue that is raised by John's question, 'Are you really the Messiah?' and the conditions and the situation that made John raise the question that the Lord, being the Messiah, wasn't proceeding to put down evil and let John out of prison. That is one example of the huge question of the problem of evil and how Jesus deals with it. What is the programme for it and why? 'Are you the Messiah that should come?' Can we believe this story anyway, about this 'until' period? Can we believe still that Jesus is the Messiah? There is evidence galore and these chapters are chockfull of the discussion of the evidence that Jesus is the Messiah, the evidence he offered to his contemporaries, and the evidence he said that would be held against them at the day of final judgment. We haven't got time this morning to go into all that but those chapters are full of the evidence that—even though he's not proceeding to cut heads off and to consign the wicked to the lake of fire forthwith—Jesus is the Messiah.

Whose son is he?

I want to proceed in my last half hour to point out what one of the major themes of the next section would be. I conceive of it as perhaps the best thing I can do as my little contribution to helping you this week—to suggest major themes like this and leave you to work out the detail. Let's look at 13:53: 'When Jesus had finished these parables, he went away from there'. So here is the phrase we're getting used to, marking the end of one section and the beginning of another. And now we're going to keep our eyes skinned for the hint as to what one at least of the main themes of the next passage is going to be.

And coming to his home town he taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, 'Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?' And they took offence at him. (13:54–57)

They stumbled at him; they couldn't make head nor tail of him. How did he have all these powers? Well they couldn't think because, as far as they knew, he was the carpenter's

son. Notice how Matthew brings that in there. Not now that they were amazed simply at the authority of his teaching, but the question is raised, 'Whose son is he?' The next divider mark is going to come at 19:1: 'Now when Jesus had finished these sayings . . .'. The section goes therefore from 13:53–19:1. Let's look through its many paragraphs and see whether there are any more references to the sonship of our blessed Lord.

Look down to chapter 14, and from verse 22 onwards is the story of our Lord's crossing the lake and the wind was contrary; and Jesus comes walking on the sea and says to them, 'Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.' The other Gospel writers have that story but now Matthew has what nobody else has. We shall notice it's a story about Peter and it ends with a confession of the sonship of our Lord.

Peter answered him, 'Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.' He said, 'Come.' So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink, he cried out, 'Lord, save me.' Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, 'O you of little faith, why did you doubt?' And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshipped him, saying, 'Truly, you are the Son of God.' (14:28–33)

Only Matthew has that, and Matthew has it in this section which begins by raising the question, 'Is this not the carpenter's son?'

Then let's go over to chapter 16. Matthew has this in common with all the others. Our Lord enquires, 'Who do people say that I am?' (v. 13). Peter eventually answers:

You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.' (16:16–17)

The church's foundation

Now you notice something that Matthew has and nobody else has. It concerns Peter and it concerns this confession of Jesus as the Son of God.

And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ. (16:18–20)

That's the second time in this section—Peter, and Jesus as the Son of God.

From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, 'Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.' But he turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan!' (16:21–23)

After dealing with that matter, Jesus took them up the Mount of Transfiguration, and there appeared Moses and Elijah. And Peter, if you please, was also doing something and saying something.

And Peter said to Jesus, 'Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.' He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.' (17:4–5)

Listen to him, Peter. And again there is a reference to the Sonship of the Lord Jesus. Then look at verse 24. Now this is a story that only Matthew has.

When they came to Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma tax went up to Peter and said, 'Does your teacher pay the tax?' He said, 'Yes.' And when he came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, saying, 'What do you think, Simon? From whom do kings of the earth take toll or tax? From their sons or from others?' And when he said, 'From others', Jesus said to him, 'Then the sons are free. However, not to give offence to them, go to the lake and cast a hook and take the first fish that comes up, and when you open his mouth you will find a shekel. Take that and give it to them for me and for yourself.' (vv. 24–27)

That's not the only occasion that Peter appears in this particular section of Matthew, but notice the twin theme—Peter and the Sonship of our Lord.

'Building my church'

Then notice the other thing peculiar to Matthew that we have read, and that is about Peter and the church. This is the only time in the Gospels, that I'm aware of, that our Lord talks about the church and his building of the church. That's not in the other Gospels, but it is here in this part of Matthew. It's not inappropriate, is it? If you look at it time-wise, John the Baptist said, 'Are you the Messiah? Why don't you get on with putting down evil, and Herod and his wife in particular?' And our Lord said, 'No. The programme is that I should go out and preach first.' There will be this 'until' period and then the judgment. And what shall fill the 'until' period? You say, 'The preaching.' And what will that produce? It will produce the Christian church. The order of the topics raised in Matthew is significant.

The Christian church: you must look at this if you can for a moment through the eyes of Jews, and unconverted Jews, when this first hit the world. Moses didn't establish a church, not that I ever heard of. And Elijah didn't establish a church, nor did Ezekiel, nor did David. Solomon built a temple, but when our Lord talks about building a church, he's not talking about a building. Church is a congregation of people. What on earth was this Jesus talking about? We've taken it for granted but it must have sounded very curious to his contemporaries.

In the Gospel that's written by one Jew, Matthew, to lots of other Jews, and written very early on—one of the earliest, if not the earliest, as some scholars now think, perhaps written as early as AD 55—what was this new phenomenon of a church and what is it built on? Is it going to be just one more sect of Judaism, like perhaps the Essenes down at Qumran

somewhere, or the Pharisees, or the Sadducees? Is he going to build another Jewish sect, or is it going to be something completely different and what is it, this building of a church that is going to fill the 'until' period? What is its foundation? What is it built on? What is the absolutely essential thing at the heart of it? How will it distinguish itself from the rest of Judaism, and the rest of the world for that matter?

The deity of Christ

And the answer, of course, is the deity of Jesus Christ—Jesus being, in the fullest sense of the term, the Son of God. It is this that, to this very present day, distinguishes Judaism from Christianity—the deity of Christ. Let me emphasize it without any party spirit in my heart, if I can manage that. It used to be clear in Christendom that the deity of Christ was the absolute foundation of the church, for which the church must stand. Judaism will not have it. On that count, they crucified Jesus, and the apostles replied, 'There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved' (Acts 4:12).

The church, Christendom I'd better say, in some centuries went to the extreme and persecuted Jews terribly, to the everlasting shame of Christendom. Haunted by that evil thing and the gas chambers of Hitler's Germany, large sections of the church now are saying that Judaism is as equal a way to God as Christianity is, and that you mustn't try and convert Jews. As one scholar put it, to talk about converting the Jews in the light of Auschwitz, is 'obscene'. Judaism is an equal way to God and you don't have to accept the deity of Christ. The modern theory of missions, embraced by the Catholic Church, is a series of concentric circles with the Pope at the midpoint, as you might expect, and the Roman Catholic Church around him, being the first circle. The next circle are the Protestants; the third circle, Judaism; the fourth circle, Islam; the fifth circle, Hinduism; the next circle, Buddhism; then come the Animists. A series of concentric circles and the modern theory, even in Catholicism, is that you don't have to convert anybody from one circle to another.

In 1968, the Jesuits were recalled from India to retrain in their mission work, under the understanding that you no longer tried to convert Hindus: so long as they are sincere in their faith that will do. Even if they have heard of Jesus, that doesn't matter. All religions are like a set of concentric circles and the centre point is the Pope. His Royal Highness, Prince Charles, wishes now to be described not as the defender of *the* faith, but simply the defender of faith. There never will be an age, there never has been an age like this one will turn out to be, since the first century, when the whole idea of the deity of Christ is in danger of being ditched by Christendom. Liberal scholarship has long since not accepted it. Jesus was but a window to God. If you hold that view, you might as well be a Hindu, because they have their avatars that come down and manifest God. The bedrock of the church, without which it disappears is, as Matthew points out to you here in this section of his book, the deity of the Lord Jesus.

You can see how the thing is advancing. We talked in that first big section about the authority of Christ and the response to that in the disciples following him. The authority of Christ will lead you to the question, 'What about the problem of evil? If he has all authority, why doesn't he put evil down?' Matthew has got to face it if his Gospel is going to be

credible. Preach to a Jewish world that is expecting the Messiah to come and execute the judgment of God and Matthew has the answer—this period of interval and why that must be. And in the interval, the kingdom is to be established at its spiritual level by preaching. There will eventually come the day of judgment. The next section goes on and now fills out what is going to be the ‘until’ period. What will Christ be doing now? He’ll be building his church. And on what will it be built? The confession of Jesus as the Son of God.

Evidence of Christ’s deity

Matthew doesn’t leave it in those bare bones, like I must do, but these chapters offer you a tremendous lot of evidence, and very interesting evidence it is. When our Lord asked Peter, ‘Who do men say that I am?’ and they had this opinion and that opinion, it was useful to have those various opinions voiced, because it gave our Lord the opportunity to show he was not satisfied with them. He’s not just one prophet among many, nor even the best of the prophets. When Peter said, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,’ our Lord said, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.’

To believe that Jesus is the Son of God, you have to have it revealed to you by the Father in heaven. How do you suppose that revelation worked? Was it that one morning Peter woke up and a voice from the blue said, ‘Peter, I want you to know that Jesus is my Son.’ Peter says, ‘Well I believe that, Lord, if you say so, but excuse me, who is Jesus? I don’t think I’ve ever met him.’ Well of course not. Matthew will tell you some of the striking incidents in Peter’s life where Peter and the others began to get the notion that Jesus was more than the carpenter’s son, as Josh McDowell¹ puts it. What was that evidence? We believe that Jesus is the Son of God: we’re Christians, aren’t we, and our great, great grandparents were all Christians? It would be interesting to go around and ask you, each one, ‘Why do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God? What convinces you?’ It would be an important question, wouldn’t it?

Sometimes we’re so used to preaching to Christian churches that we forget to raise the absolute fundamentals of why we believe he’s the Son of God at all. We take that bit for granted, as though everybody believed it and they were right to believe it. Then the old liberal comes along and kicks the whole pack of cards down, and we don’t know why we believed it in the first place. So much of our theology in many a university, being an academic institution, is based on criticism. And many of the theologians in their actual work don’t proceed on the assumption that Jesus is the Son of God. I was in a bookshop in Hereford and saw the new revised New English Bible (NEB) and was going to buy it. It was going to cost me twenty pounds, but I was prepared to sing in the street to get the money to buy it! I thought that I would just look to see how it translates the famous verses of Philippians 2:5–6. Instead of ‘He thought it not robbery to be equal with God’ (KJV) or something of the sort, it has ‘He laid no claim to deity’. That was being sold as a Bible in a Christian bookshop!

¹ Josh McDowell, *More than a Carpenter*, Tyndale House, 1977.

Oh, my dear brothers and sisters and fellow workers in the kingdom of God, we must equip ourselves. We must make sure our young folks, if they're believers, are not just entertained. They need to know why they believe Jesus is the Son of God, not take it for granted. What was the evidence that made Peter and these other men begin to think that Jesus was the Son of God? Well Matthew is trying to tell you. He's nudging you in the ribs in all directions, saying things that the other evangelists don't say. Why all the fuss about Peter? Well Peter was the fellow who confessed the Lord on that occasion, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God', and on that the church is built. This is the distinctive of the church, without which it falls completely. How did Peter then, and the others, come to think that the man who was riding in the boat with them, walking down the road with them, sitting at a meal with them, was the Son of God? Peter will tell you his experiences, and mighty great lessons they have for us. 'Reasons why I believe in the deity of Christ' by St. Peter himself—how would that do for a series of sermons!

There was that night on the boat, when the Lord came walking on the water, and they all cried out thinking it was a spirit. That was logic: spirits are pretty unsubstantial. If you were to try and grasp one in your fingers it would go through: it's like so much fog. And they walk easily on water. They were a bit scared at seeing a spirit in the middle of the night on the sea, but what else could it be? A voice came back, 'Don't be afraid, it is I.' Jesus? Well he was a solid man, flesh and bones and things. A man walking on the water? I don't know how you think Peter's brain worked, but sometimes he jumped five or six steps in logic. He said, 'Lord, if it is you, command me to come on the water.'

What was the logic behind that? How is Jesus walking on the water, and how did that lead Peter to think he could? Well you must work that out yourself. Some people hold the view that it was Peter being like he always was, saying things out of turn and being heroic and so on, when he ought to have kept in the boat. That won't do, will it? Because the Lord said to Peter, 'Come,' and it was a response of faith. At the Lord's invitation he got down out of the boat and started to walk and you know what happened next. And when they got him back in the boat, they said, 'Truly, this is the Son of God.'

Is that all just past history or, like other miracles, does that convey a lesson to us, how we may discover Jesus is the Son of God? We see Peter, with all the marvellous lessons that there came, including the transfiguration and the voice from heaven. 'We heard the voice,' says Peter, in his second letter. We haven't followed myths. This is not the myth of Christ incarnate, as the liberal theologians talk about it. 'This is reality,' says Peter. 'We've not followed myths. We were on that mountain. We saw the majesty and we actually heard with our two ears, the voice come out of heaven. We heard the direct voice of almighty God'; as clear as the Jews heard it round Mount Sinai in the Old Testament.

For all that, Peter wasn't always consistent in working it out into practice. So there came those who collected the temple tax and they said,

'Doesn't your master pay tax, Peter?'

'Of course he does, yes.'

And when he got back to the house the Lord said,

'Peter, I'd like to put a question to you. The kings of the earth, who do they take taxes from, their sons or others?'

'Others, of course.'

'So the sons don't have to pay tax then?'

'No.'

'Didn't you just say that I have to pay tax to the temple? It happens to be my Father's house, Peter.'

'Oh.'

He hadn't worked that one out, had he? Sometimes, even in Christian service, we can go along and, while we technically believe Jesus is the Son of God, we can approach our Scripture study or our work for the Lord as if he wasn't. We haven't got quite into the way of thinking yet!

Salvation

The Saving of the Soul

Today again we will look at the Gospels, and one Gospel in particular, but not to do quite the same thing as we were attempting yesterday. Yesterday, you remember, we looked at the Gospel by Matthew, to see how he organizes the material that he has chosen to record, how he has divided it very neatly, structured it into very clearly defined groups and that, within each group, there is a dominant theme or themes. And so we were alerting ourselves again to the fact that the Gospels do not simply record a whole string of individual stories about the Lord and his life and teaching, leaving us to make of them what we will. The Gospel writers have their own reasons for arranging the material as they do and they raise fundamental questions and present fundamental details about the life of our Lord and his teaching; and we tried in three of Matthew's sections to see what some of those dominant themes might be.

Today, I'd like to discuss with you the doctrine of salvation as we find it in the Gospels and to enquire how it is related to the doctrine of salvation as we find it in the epistles. Now we shall all recognize at once some of the elements in the biblical New Testament doctrine of salvation.

Regeneration and eternal life

There is that strand that concerns itself with regeneration and the need for people to be begotten of God, to be born from above; and when they are born of God, they receive the life of God, which is eternal life. There's no difficulty in knowing which of the epistles talks of that, and which of the Gospels talk of that. The Gospel of John is the Gospel to which you would readily go to learn or to preach about salvation in the sense of regeneration and new birth and the gift of eternal life. And in the epistles, not surprisingly, it is the Epistles by John that pre-eminently deal with this aspect of salvation.

Justification by faith

Another strand in the New Testament's doctrine of salvation is of course the justification by faith without the works of the law. If you were going to expound and preach on that doctrine, you would turn to the Pauline Epistles. You won't find a lot in Paul about eternal life. You will find some. He believes in it of course and believes in regeneration, but you won't find a great deal of mention of eternal life in the Epistles of Paul. You'll find it, as we say, in the Gospel of John and the Epistles of John. Conversely, you won't find much

reference to justification by faith in the Gospel or the Epistles by John. His interest and emphasis lie elsewhere, as we have seen. Doctrines of justification by faith and subsequent sanctification are more typically to be found in the Epistles of Paul.

The salvation of the soul

There is, however, another strand of the doctrine of salvation in the epistles, and that is the salvation of the soul. I want to start with that this morning, and the writer that you would go to for that is Peter. The other writers talk about it briefly, but Peter is the one who, in his epistles, concentrates on the doctrine of the salvation of the soul. Let's turn to Peter and notice the sheer fact. Then we shall notice where Peter learnt this doctrine that he develops in his epistles, and that will take us back to the Gospels. Just let's notice the occurrence in Peter of this question of the soul.

Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. (1 Pet 1:8-9)

Knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God. (1 Pet 1:18-23)

The salvation of your souls and the purification of your souls—'having purified your souls' (v. 22)—that is an idea that you'll find coming from Peter's lips elsewhere. Just let me diverge at that point to remind you how Peter phrased himself on the famous occasion at Jerusalem, commonly called the Counsel of Jerusalem. He is supporting Paul and Barnabas in their contention that Gentiles are justified by faith and not by the works of the law, and therefore Gentile believers do not need to be circumcised, either to be saved or to keep saved. So here is Peter in Acts 15:

Peter stood up and said to them, 'Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith.' (vv. 7-9)

Notice that phrase 'having cleansed their hearts by faith'. He's referring to their conversion experience, which he here describes under the term 'cleansing their hearts by faith' and thus giving them the Holy Spirit. In his Epistle, he uses a similar term, 'Having

purified your souls.’ He’s talking of their conversion, as you see at once by what he says in the following verse, ‘Having been born again’ (1 Pet 1:23)—the purification of the soul.

Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. (2:11)

For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. (2:25)

Therefore let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good. (4:19)

The meaning of ‘soul’

These verses are enough to show us that Peter is very much interested in this particular aspect of salvation: the salvation and purification of the soul. He refers to it far more than do the writers Paul and John. The question that arises is where Peter got this emphasis from, so let’s turn back to our Gospel of Matthew and read some verses in chapter 16. These verses relate what happened immediately after Peter had made his tremendous confession, ‘We believe that you are the Christ, the Son of the living God’ (v. 16). Our blessed Lord had replied by saying, ‘Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it’ (vv. 17–18), and so forth. There then came a course of teaching that began and persisted through the later stages of our Lord’s ministry.

From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, ‘Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you’. But he turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.’ Then Jesus told his disciples, ‘If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever would save his . . .’ (Matt 16:21–25)

And now we hit a problem. There’s a problem in English, not in Greek, but it’s a problem to know how to translate the Greek word that is used here, as in many other places in the New Testament. It’s *psuché* in Greek, and we have it in many English transliterations in the form *psyche*, as in words like psychology and so forth. What does it mean? How are we going to translate it? Therein lies a little bit of a problem because the Greek word *psuché* has a moderately wide range of connotations. Obviously, it doesn’t mean all the connotations at once in every place, so first we have to examine its range of connotations. Let me quote you some examples of *psuché* in the New Testament.

Those who sought the child’s [*psuché*] are dead. (Matt 2:20)

What does that mean? How would you translate *psuché* there? Well it means his life. Herod and all his successors had slain the babes under two years old and our Lord had been taken by his parents to Egypt to escape their murderous intentions. When those men were

dead, the angel of the Lord told Joseph it was safe to return to Palestine, 'For those who sought the child's . . .'—well, of course, physical life. Herod and company weren't interested in spiritual welfare—the soul.

Do not be anxious about your [*psuchē*], what you will eat, or what you will drink . . . what you will put on. (Matt 6:25)

When you drink and when you eat, you normally are thinking of building up your physical life; and when you clothe yourself, you're not normally thinking of clothing your soul, in the spiritual sense. You're thinking of clothing your body: protecting your physical life. So when our Lord says 'Don't be anxious for your life' you wouldn't normally translate it 'soul' there, would you? But there you begin to see a sort of overlap, particularly when you remember the Old Testament background to the use of this word 'soul'.

Isaac with his dim eyes, but his smell very much alive and his taste buds still groaning after venison, charged Esau his son to go out and get venison and 'make me some venison, which my soul loves' (Gen 27:4, own trans.). You watch a man who loves beefsteaks sitting down to a T-bone steak. It isn't just his stomach that is delighting in it; he's not just feeding his physical life. His very soul is enjoying it! And of course very often in the Hebrew background, its word for soul, *nephesh*, includes not only your physical life but all those deeper appetites and sensations and enjoyments that go to make us more than just machines. I never knew a car to enjoy being filled up with petrol: they take a lot, they seem to need it, but they don't particularly react as though they enjoyed it! When we are feeding our physical life, it very often delights us at deeper levels. And the words *nephesh* in Hebrew and *psuché* in Greek, particularly *psuché* in the New Testament Greek, carry these connotations that begin to merge with one another.

I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your [*psuché*]. (3 John 2)

Here we go to the other extreme. What does that mean? 'That you may be in good health' is obviously physical health. 'As it goes well with your *psuché*': the same word in Greek, but now it is not physical life; it's something different, meaning perhaps his inner spiritual life. John wishes Gaius that his outer physical life will go well just as his inner spiritual life is going well. We all know folks who show a delightful mature, Christ-like inner spiritual life, who might be crippled with some disease physically.

So *psuché* in the New Testament is a word of very broad meaning, and that means that in the verses in front of us, we start off with a little difficulty to know how you would translate them. Perhaps I shall cast the difficulty upon your shoulders and ask you how I should translate them? For instance, Matthew 16:25: 'For whoever would save his [what?] will lose it: but whoever loses his [what?] for my sake, will find it. For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his [what?].'

AUDIENCE: Soul.

DWG: Oh, we've got an advance on that. That's encouraging. That's one of the three places then. Everybody comes down in verse 26! We shall translate it 'soul'. Everybody agreed? For verse 26, you vote for 'soul'. What about verse 25 then? 'Whoever would save his *soul* will lose it'? Sounds a bit odd, doesn't it? The evangelists normally come at you and say, 'Is your soul saved? Beware, lest you lose your soul.' We know what they mean: it's a very serious matter. But the evangelist doesn't normally tell you that the way to save your soul in that sense is to lose it. These two verses spoken in one breath—how shall we understand them?

AUDIENCE: Verse 25 is different from 26.

DWG: Yes, that's what some of the translations do. They translate it, 'life' in verse 25, and 'soul' in verse 26.

Anyway, what we may have established surely is that this is where Peter gained his first interest in this topic, and that is why in his epistle he, more than anybody else, proportionately, talks about the soul and the salvation of the soul.

In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials . . . you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. (1 Pet 1:6–9)

This is Peter and it's very natural, isn't it, because he learnt this lesson first on that famous occasion, or shortly thereafter. He had just been congratulated by the Lord, 'Blessed are you, Peter, for flesh and blood has not revealed to you this magnificent fact that I am the Christ, the Son of the living God. You are to be in the foundation of the very church that I am to build. The church is built upon this.' Then our Lord began to teach them that he must go to Jerusalem and be rejected by the chief priests and scribes and be crucified, and rise again. And Peter had the audacity to rebuke him, which gave rise to the solemn rebuke from the Lord. Peter never forgot it.

Among the many allusions that you find in his Epistles to his experiences of Christ when he walked with him on earth, this one is prominent. 'As you come to him,' says Peter, 'a living stone rejected by men, but in the sight of God chosen and precious' (1 Pet 2:4). And as he wrote the words, 'rejected by men', I wonder if the colour rose in his cheeks or a tear dropped on to the old papyrus, for it was when the Lord taught him that he must be rejected by men that Peter said, 'Oh, no, Lord. You've got that bit wrong. No, surely not?' He never forgot what our Lord then said, 'Get behind me, Satan! Don't set your mind on the things of men, but on the things of God; for anyone who would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. Whoever would save his life [or 'soul'] will lose it, But whoever loses his life [or 'soul'] for my sake, will find it' (Matt 16:21–25, own trans.). It is very natural that Peter talks to us about the salvation of the soul.

So then, let's hold the word 'soul' in our mind, and observe it has these different connotations. Then we shall be able to decide, as we go along, which connotation to choose in any particular point. It can mean your physical life. It can go deeper and mean your emotions, like old Isaac eating his venison and not only nurturing his physical life, but really enjoying it and his emotions are involved. It can mean 'soul' in the deeper sense still of your spiritual welfare. 'I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health,

as it goes well with your soul' (3 John 2). As a rough and ready definition, I would like to say that soul, *psuché*, covers your physical life; and not just your physical life as a biological thing, but all the rest. For instance, your physical life has a time element to it, doesn't it? You can't keep physical life in a box until you're put in your coffin—and then you haven't got it anymore anyway!

Your soul, in the sense of your physical life, has this time element to it. And we can talk about people spending their life on something. We can talk about people wasting their life. Life is not just a static object. It involves your time and, of course, life has its emotions—your love, your hate; it has its energy and, if you notice, these things are things also that you can't keep in a box. You have to spend them. You have to spend your energy on something. Is your energy part of you? The Bible would say that you have to love the Lord with all your soul. You have to work for the Lord out of your very soul. As we say in English, 'You put your heart and soul into it.' The Hebrew would understand what you mean. You don't just do it mechanically, but your emotions are involved, your energy's involved, you give of your time unsparingly.

The 'two worlds'

Your soul is your self—your life in all those senses. If that is its range of meaning, how do you make sense of the fact that you've got to lose it in order to keep it? It seems to me that our Lord helped them understand what, for them, was a difficult conundrum by what he went on to say. Look at Matthew 16:26: 'For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?' And now comes the explanation that will make sense of it.

For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done. (16:27)

To help us understand this business that you have to lose your *psuché* to keep it, our Lord reminds the apostles that there are two ages. There is this present age and there is the age to come. 'The time is coming when the Son of Man will come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.'

This age isn't all there is. There is a coming age. As our Lord has just pointed out to them, in this age Jesus must go to Jerusalem and be rejected by the priests and the scribes and the Pharisees. In the coming age, he will come in the glory of his Father and the holy angels. If that be true, the question that now arises is, in which age are you investing your souls? For which age are you spending your time, your energies, your love, your hope? For which world, if I might put it that way—this present one or the coming one? The solemn fact that our Lord is teaching his disciples is that you can't live for both.

One can begin to understand how Peter felt. He'd just confessed the Lord Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the living God, when the Messiah, to his astonishment, began to teach them that he would go to Jerusalem and be rejected of the scribes and Pharisees and be crucified. 'No,' said Peter, 'you mustn't let those ideas get into your head. You don't want to say, "I'm going up to Jerusalem and I'm going to be defeated and I'm going to be

crucified and rejected.” You want to learn to think positively. You want to say to yourself, “I’m going to be a success” and when you get to Jerusalem, you *will* be a success. God is on our side, isn’t he? You want to be positive. Besides that, Lord, I’ve invested a lot of time in you. I gave up my work—my fishing that was quite profitable on occasions. And I’ve invested a lot of money in you, and I’m away from home and my dear wife: she suffers a lot with me away from home all these months; and money, Lord, not to put too fine a point on it. If you’re going to be crucified, everything I’ve spent on you has gone down the drain. No, you must get those ideas out of your head. You’re going to be a success and when you’re a success, I shall be a success too, on the right hand or on the left hand of the reigning monarch.’

It was in that kind of context that our Lord taught this doctrine of the salvation of the soul. ‘No, Peter. Your mind is not set on the things of God, but the things of men. If you’re not prepared to lose your soul in this age for me, you will in fact lose it in the age to come. But if you are prepared to lose your *psuché* for me in this present age, you’ll keep it in the age to come.’

That becomes a very important strand in our doctrine of salvation. As you see from Peter’s writing, if you were to ask him about the salvation of the soul, he would say, ‘Yes, there is an initial salvation of the soul. You have purified your souls by obeying the truth, having been born again by the word of God that lives and abides forever.’ So there’s the initial experience. Peter believes in people being born again of course and, in that moment, in the purification of their soul. But now that the soul is saved, that raises the question, what is a soul now that it’s been saved? Where do you keep it—in the bank? And when the Lord comes, you say, ‘Half a minute, Lord. I’ve just got to run down to the bank and collect my soul’? Of course not. The soul is you: it’s your life, your time, your energy, your love, your hates if you have any, your desires. Your soul is saved, thank the Lord, but you have to spend it. What will you spend it on?

Now it comes to a question of how you will invest your redeemed soul. To help them understand this, our Lord staged what follows next in the text of the Gospels—the story of the transfiguration. Let’s read those verses again.

For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done. Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom. And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them. (Matt 16:27–17:2)

The transfiguration

Here I shall have to stop again, because multitudes of scholars far better than I could ever be, say that verse 28 has nothing to do with the transfiguration that follows now in chapter 17. They say that it wouldn’t make any sense to say to the twelve apostles, ‘Some of you standing here won’t die before you see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom’ if the coming of the Son of Man in his kingdom was going to happen just six days later. Holding that view, then, they find it a little bit difficult to know what verse 28 is talking about. It can’t

mean at his second coming, because they'd all be dead before the second coming. So some people say, 'Well could it be Pentecost?' But on the day of Pentecost it was the Holy Spirit who came, not the Son of Man. Nevertheless, spiritualizing it, they say that what the Lord meant was that some of you will be alive when the kingdom of Christ will be established on the day of Pentecost.

Whilst acknowledging the strength of their views, I believe that the transfiguration was meant to fulfil in some sense the promise of verse 28. One can perhaps establish that by concentrating at first on the sheer run of the narrative. What were they promised that they would see? They would see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom. I want you to do a little hard work. The transfiguration is reported three times in the Gospels, in Matthew, Mark and Luke. It is always reported in the same context and it has always a number of features together. There is, as here, this introductory statement: 'There are some of you standing here who won't see death until they see something or other. Then there is the account of the transfiguration itself. That is followed, as here, by the account of the healing of an epileptic boy. When they came down from the mountain, a father met them, bringing his epileptic boy, and said to the Lord Jesus, 'I asked your disciples to heal him and cast the demon out, but they couldn't and if you can do anything, please heal him' (Matt 17:14-16, own trans.).

Now that is the form in which this comes in all three stories. May I ask you to notice how the stories differ slightly in the way they are presented in the three Gospels. So look at the promise: they were not to see death 'until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom', says Matthew (16:28); 'until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power', says Mark (9:1); and 'until they see the kingdom of God', says Luke (9:27). So there are slight differences in the way the promise is stated. They don't contradict of course: they supplement each other. Are the differences significant? Well, yes they are. The easiest place to see that is if you go back to Mark's account. What were they to see? They were to 'see the kingdom of God after it has come with power'. The word *power* is *dunamis* in Greek, and its verb form means 'to have power'. Now look at the account of the transfiguration in Mark.

After six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them. (Mark 9:2-3)

Only Mark has that phrase. Neither Matthew nor Luke has anything about laundry men being able to whiten clothes. It's only Mark has that, and they were promised that they would see the kingdom of God come with power. Now they see his garments radiant white as no laundry man on earth could (Greek: 'has the power to') whiten them. But now look at Mark's story of what happened when they came down the mountain.

And someone from the crowd answered him, 'Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute. And whenever it seizes him, it throws him down, and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able.' And he answered them, 'O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me.' And they brought the boy to him. And when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and

rolled about, foaming at the mouth. And Jesus asked his father, 'How long has this been happening to him?' And he said, 'From childhood. And it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him. But if you can [Greek: have the power to] do anything, have compassion on us and help us.' (Mark 9:17-22)

And our Lord replies, 'If you can!' meaning, 'What do you mean, if I can?' And the word here is the adjective, *dunatos*, 'All things are within the power of him that believes' (9:23).

These are peculiar to Mark and his account. It looks, to me at any rate, simply from a literary point of view and from the flow of the narrative, as if Mark saw the transfiguration as the fulfilment of our Lord's promise: 'There are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God come with power.' What he concentrates on, therefore, is the transfiguration as an exhibition of the power of God; and then he follows it by a story in which the point is taken up, showing how that power is to be applied and taken advantage of. With that in mind I'm going to assume, and so you'll have to put up with me if you don't agree, that this is intended in each of the three occasions.

And what were they promised to see in Matthew? The point they must learn is that our Lord in this age is going to be rejected and Peter must accept this, with all that it may mean. If the Messiah is rejected and crucified, it wouldn't be surprising if Peter lost his physical life, and lost the good of many other things, and Peter must accept it. And if Peter is not prepared that he might even have to lose his physical life for the sake of Messiah in this age, he would lose it in the next. There are two ages, two worlds and which shall we live for? To help them with the conundrum, our Lord said, 'Some of you won't have to wait until you die to see the kingdom of heaven.' The normal way we get into that heavenly kingdom is for us to die, or for the Lord to come. 'I'm going to give you a vision of that coming kingdom.' So when they came down the mountain, the Lord Jesus said, 'Tell the vision to no man.' The transfiguration was a real event, but the apostles saw it as a vision, a vision of that coming kingdom.

Matthew describes the scene on the mountain, 'And he was transfigured before us.' The first thing you learn is, 'There *is* another world then.' And look at his face: 'And his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as the light'. In this other world, Christ is central, like the sun is to our solar system. And look there, that must be Elijah, and there is Moses. What a thing, because the scribes 'sat in Moses' seat'; and Peter, as a little boy and as a fisherman, was brought up to revere the Jewish scribes, for they were the official theologians. They expounded the Scripture and if the scribes were against Jesus and all the official theologians in Judaism were against Jesus, for Peter the fisherman, untrained in theology, that was a tremendous weight of power against Jesus. But in this other world, Moses is with Jesus. In this other world, Elijah, the great prophet, is with Jesus. That of course is the basic claim of Christ: that he is the fulfilment of the law, the prophets and the psalms, and here Peter sees him.

More to the point, when Peter says, 'Lord, it's good for us to be here. Let's make three tents, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah', there comes a voice out of the cloud saying, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I'm well pleased; listen to him' (Matt 17:5). So now Peter must decide. Down here, so to speak, the scribes, the Pharisees and the Sadducees, the

leaders of the nation and the Sanhedrin, will condemn Jesus and they will say to Peter, 'Look here, Peter. You are a desperate fool, investing all your time and money and energy and resources on this Jesus. We're telling you now, we think he's a fanatic and he's an absolute blasphemer actually, and the power that he uses is of the devil. We'll tell you straight, Peter, one of these days, we shall get tired of him and we shall be obliged to crucify him. Don't be a fool, Peter, and invest your life in following him. You only have one life to live. Keep it.' But the voice up here is saying, 'Peter, Jesus is my Son, my beloved Son. If I were you, Peter, I should listen to *him*.' It's obvious you can't live for both worlds at the same time. You have to make up your mind where you are going to invest your soul.

Paul has to say of one of his erstwhile workers, 'Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present age' (2 Tim 4:10), and therefore was determined now not to waste his life. He wasn't going to lose it anymore. He was going to keep his life by loving this present age. But the voice up the mountain is saying, 'Don't do that. If you invest your life in this age, you'll lose it in the age to come.'

A change of mindset

There's another little feature that in Matthew binds these stories together. When they came to the crowd, a man came to him and asked, 'Lord, have mercy on my son: for he is epileptic and suffers terribly' (17:15). It is Matthew that tells you that he was *epileptic*. The Greek word for it is 'moonstruck', that's what *lunatic* means in English and that is the word being used. The modern translators have softened it a bit, saying epileptic. Anyway, it was a disease of the brain. It affected the lad's thinking and because he had this epilepsy, he fell into the fire at times, and then he fell into the water. He didn't mean to, but something was wrong with his brain, poor chap, and he was in danger of ruining himself and destroying his life because of these wrong mechanisms of the brain. Interesting that, isn't it? Do you know what the Lord told Peter, before he went up the mountain? When Peter took him and began to rebuke him, saying, 'Be it far from you, Lord, you're never going to be rejected and crucified', the Lord turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan. You are a hindrance to me for there's something wrong with your thinking. You're not setting your mind on the things of God but on the things of man.'

Peter isn't afraid to tell us that before he went up the mountain, there was something completely wrong with his mindset. He looked at things as this world looks at them and because he had that mindset, Peter was in danger of making a colossal mistake of taking loss as though it were gain, and treating gain as though it were loss. Or to put it in other words, Peter was in danger of wanting to keep his life in this world, thinking he was gaining, when all the time he would be losing it; and finding it very difficult to think that to lose his life was in fact gain, because his mind was wrong. He needed to be taken up the mountain to be given the vision of the Son of Man coming in his kingdom. That would put his mind right, like the Lord did physically for the boy, when he came down from the mountain and cured his epilepsy.

So it's from Matthew we learn the very basics. There is another age. If we're going to save ourselves, we must get it firmly in our head that this age isn't all there is. There's a coming age. You cannot in that sense live for both. You must be prepared to live for Christ

in this one and that will often mean losing your life, but if you're prepared to lose it in this world, you will keep it to life eternal. In some countries, ladies and gentlemen, you know it, don't you, when a person is faced with the very basics of salvation—are they going to believe on Christ and be born again and justified by faith—they know in their hearts if they say, 'Yes,' to that and receive the gift—and it's a complete gift of eternal life, you don't have to earn it, you don't have to buy it, it's a complete gift—but they know very well if they take that gift, they must be prepared to face death. Their very own parents will perhaps give them a little sweetmeat and it's got horsehair rolled up in the pastry, and they eat it and it causes inflammation of the insides and perforation, and they're dead. In some places in the Sudan, Christians are being literally crucified. It is the abnormal that we don't endure persecution for Christ.

I had a dear Romanian brother, studying theology in the Baptist College last year in Queen's, and he stayed in my home and he said to me over breakfast one day, 'You know, the older men who'd been in prison in the bad days used to tell us younger men, "When you're taken into interrogation, you must say goodbye in your heart to your wife and family. If you don't, they'll get you, because halfway through the three-day interrogation, you'll be confronted perhaps with a letter in your wife's handwriting, signed by your wife, to the effect that she's abandoned her Christianity, and if you don't abandon your Christianity, she'll forsake you. You've no means of knowing from her handwriting that this is a fake. If you don't say goodbye to your wife and family, you'll come unstuck."'

That's something, isn't it? But of course we don't have to suffer that kind of persecution for Christ and our souls are saved. You say, 'My soul is saved for eternity.' Of course it is, if you've trusted Christ and purified your soul by obeying the truth, you're born again of the incorruptible seed of the word of God. But it remains that it's a life redeemed which you've got to spend. And the question is, on what are we going to spend our redeemed lives, our time, our energies, our loves, our hates, hopes? There is another world. We live for that one and we lose our life, if need be, in this one, but we save it to life eternal.

A change of affections

Peter has a very practical exhortation to follow that in his first Epistle.

Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart fervently, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; for 'All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains for ever.' (1:22–25; cf. Isa 40:6–8)

Love one another. You see, you've got to love something, and you spend your time and energy and money on what you love. 'Now you've been born again,' says Peter, 'your souls have been purified; well love your brothers.' You say, 'Do you happen to know my brothers, Peter? They are a dull crowd. The world outside is beauty. Surely God wants us to enjoy beauty. Look at the daffodils and all the beautiful things there and why shouldn't you love the world? My brothers, they're nice sorts, but they are dreadfully dull.' 'But,' says Peter,

'they're going to last, you know. All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The flower fades and the passion of this world passes away. But your good brothers and sisters that you say are dull, they're going to last eternally—born again with the word of God that lives and abides forever. Everything you spend on them, the love you spend on them, the time you spend on them, the energy you spend on them, you keep for eternity. Love the world and it passes away and you've lost what you spent on it.'

Salvation of the soul; and now let's briefly look at the other two occasions. In Mark 9:1, as we noticed, our Lord promises them: 'There are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God when it has come with power.' So up the mountain they went, expecting to see a tremendous exhibition of power.

A glimpse of the kingdom

Now had you been promised that you would see the kingdom of God come with power, what would you have expected to see? You say, 'I'd have expected at least a legion of angels, all armed with heavenly swords in their sheaths and mighty great trumpets and vast noise effects that would fill the whole universe with thunders and lightnings and colossal great exhibitions of power.' They went up the mountain, promised to see the kingdom of God come with power, and what they saw was that his clothes became exceeding white, so as no laundry man on earth has power to whiten them.

Would you think that's a particularly strong exhibition of power? If you went to the Soviet Union in the old days, if they wanted to impress you with their power, they'd line you up on the Red Square, while the boys stood up on top of Lenin's Tomb there, and they'd drag in front of you their inter-continental ballistic missiles. Now be impressed by that: that's power for you. But the kingdom of God in power? 'Look at the whiteness of his clothes,' says Mark. That's an unearthly purity. It's a very easy symbol. In the Bible, a man's clothes very often bespeak his character—a purity of life and character that was unearthly. That's our gospel, isn't it? We have the power to send men to the moon and beyond but can't control our own tempers. We can preach to the world that Christ can reconcile them to God and to one another, and then in our Christian work fall out and bludgeon each other. Curious lot, aren't we? The world's problems don't stem from the fact that we haven't yet understood all about the atom. The world's problems are that of the human heart. There is no hope for a paradise of bliss unless some power more than human can whiten our garments. Keep your finger in that.

They tell me that behind Mark's Gospel was Peter: Mark wrote it, but Peter gave him the information. It could be so, because there's one place in the epistles where the transfiguration is mentioned, and that's 2 Peter 1:

Therefore I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have. I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder, since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me. And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things. For we did not follow cleverly devised myths, when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were

eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honour and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased', we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain. (2 Pet 1:12-18)

Peter, as he looks back on that event, saw it as an impressive exhibition of the power and coming. Matthew tells us it was a picture of the Son of Man coming in his kingdom. Mark says it was a picture, a vision, of Christ coming, the kingdom of God coming with power. Peter has got both ideas in his recollection of the transfiguration in 2 Peter 1, so he is reminding the believers, 'Look, we have not followed cunningly devised fables. This was real. We were actually there. We actually heard that voice come out of the cloud. That cloud which was the Shekinah glory of the presence of God. We heard God speak, every bit as much as the Israelites round Mount Sinai saw no form, but they heard the voice come out of heaven, as Moses reminded them. We heard it. It is not a fable. It certainly isn't a myth. We were there. We heard with our two ears the voice come out of heaven, and we saw this exhibition of his power and coming.'

Why is Peter so concerned to get the believers remembering that? He says, 'I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth.' So first of all, he's going to remind them of these things and then he says, 'I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up.' I like that from a preacher's point of view! You can preach to a congregation sometimes about the coming of the Lord Jesus and they nod and they're half asleep. That's no good. You're not only to remind them, you've to get them by the shoulders and shake them, bounce them on the seats, stir them up, because if the power and coming of our Lord hasn't got a grip of us, we've missed the point of it.

We may know the fact. It's recognizing the significance of the fact. 'And I'm going to do it,' says Peter, 'I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things.' And when I'm gone to heaven, you'll be gathered over some beautiful dinner party that Mrs So-and-So has put on, and the conversation will turn to Peter.

'Remember Peter?'

'Oh, Peter, yes, did he ever come to your church to preach?'

And one voice will pipe up, 'You know, funny thing about Peter, he was always harping on the same things. I never can think of Peter without thinking that he was always talking about the second coming and the power of Christ, wasn't he?'

'Good,' says Peter, 'I've done my job.'

He wants it that way, that whenever you think of Peter, you'll say to yourself, 'Ah, yes, he was always talking about it, wasn't he?'

'That you may be able to recall these things after my decease.' What things? What is the point of saying all this about the transfiguration? Well, listen to the first paragraph in that letter.

May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to

us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For whoever lacks these qualities is so short-sighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practise these qualities you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. (2 Pet 1:2–11)

The power is available. We were eyewitnesses of his majesty and of his power. The power is available. What's it for? Well, his divine power has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness, but alongside that you are to be diligent, says Peter, to add those qualities to your Christian character and to develop as believers. You say, 'Why should I bother? My soul is saved. I can point to the date that my soul was saved. I'm going to be in heaven, whether I make any progress or not.' Well so, but that isn't quite the point. Listen to the last verse, 'For in this way there will be richly provided for you'—not just provided, but *richly* provided for you—'an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.' The emphasis is on the adverb, 'it will be *richly* provided for you'. Not a question of, 'If you do these things you'll get in.' Every believer will get into the eternal kingdom.

A change in perception

The terms upon which we enter the eternal city we find in Revelation 22:14. 'Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.' Those that wash their robes in the blood of the Lamb: every blood-washed believer will enter the eternal kingdom, but this verse is saying that some will have an entrance provided for them *richly*, and some just an entrance. You say, 'I shall be content to be there. Some low place within his door will do me.' Really, will it? For all eternity? What does it mean to enter the eternal kingdom? How do you picture heaven anyway? As a big opera house with plush seats, some more expensive than others, but everybody who's inside sees the show? Just a place you get in?

Or could heaven also be an experience, and could it be that our enjoyment of the experience will depend on how much we have developed our souls here? The only illustration I can think of—it's worn out now and long overdue for re-tread, but wiser heads than mine can think of a better one!—I picture a Christmas party with different folks there. There's a little chap of a year-and-a-half in his highchair by the table; there's a boy of about eight; there's a girl of seventeen; and there's mum and dad. They're all at the party and they're all enjoying it to their full capacity.

The boy of one-and-a-half years has got hold of a ladle and he's got it into the cream and he's pouring it over his head and on the floor, having a marvellous time. And at six thirty, his mother takes him, baths him and puts him to bed and he thinks it's been marvellous. The chap of eight is on the floor playing with his digital computer trains with his father. The little boy, from time to time, looks over from his highchair. He's not interested: he doesn't know what's going on in fact. Why? Because he hasn't grown, so he doesn't know what he's missing. The boy of eight isn't pouring cream over his head. He is enjoying the trains on the floor. Then there's sweet seventeen. Oh, you should see her. Marks and Spencer couldn't provide a gown like that: it's superb. She's sitting on a settee and at the other end of the settee is a gallant young gentleman. The boy on the floor keeps pestering his sister, 'Come and sit on the floor and play trains.' But she's not interested in playing trains. What on earth is she doing? Well she's just talking to this young man. An eight-year-old can't make out why anybody in their right mind would sit on a settee talking to somebody when they could be playing with trains. You say, 'Well he hasn't grown up, has he?' They're all at the party. The party was an experience, but a multi-layered experience. They all enjoyed it to the full of their capacity, but some enjoyed it more than others.

Is heaven that real? Because if it is, 'the power is available; his divine power', says Peter. 'We saw an exhibition of it up the mountain. The way his clothes were white and glistening, so as no launderer on earth could whiten them.' There was unearthly purity, gloriously beautiful. And the power is available but we shall need on our part to add all diligence to co-operate with God to add these things to our character so that we grow. And thus the entrance will be provided for us richly into that eternal kingdom. Very serious. Wonderful, but serious.

'It is possible,' says Peter, 'to be saved and then forget the past, and to be short-sighted as to the future.' He that forgets this need to progress is forgetting what the goal is, and then when you forget the goal, it's all too possible to forget the past as well. He's forgotten the cleansing of his former sins. Ask him what salvation is all about now and he isn't quite sure. So we need this vision of the coming kingdom of God, the coming of Christ, so that it would urge us on and control our spending of our souls, so that our souls may be saved in the fundamental sense. We have chosen the Saviour. Souls have been purified, have been born again, but now we have the responsibility of using those souls, spending those souls, those redeemed lives and their powers, and making something of them for eternity.

And that is where Mark's final story in the transfiguration comes in. You noticed what happened when they came down from the mountain. There's this father and he says, 'I brought my son to your apostles and they couldn't cast out the demon. If you have the power to do anything, have compassion on us.'

'If you can', literally, 'If you have the power, have compassion on us.' 'What do you mean, "if you have the power?"' says Christ. 'It's not a question of whether I have the power. The question is, have you the power to believe? For all things are possible [are within the power of—*dunatos* is the word] to him that believes.' And the man replied, 'Lord, I do believe; help my unbelief.' And the Lord didn't say, 'Certainly not. I shall wait until your faith is absolutely perfect. I wouldn't dream of giving you anything until your faith is

perfect.' Well, of course not. Even though his faith was imperfect, the Lord blessed him. We have to pray, according to Paul, and it would be wise to pray it daily:

Having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power towards us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places. (Eph 1:18-20)

So that's Matthew and Mark, and what about Luke? Like all good teachers, I leave that to you!

Question session

Soul versus spirit

AUDIENCE: Could you just follow the question on the soul; would you be recognizing the soul as distinct from the spirit—man being a dichotomy or trichotomy?

DWG: Well I do observe this: that the New Testament speaks of salvation in all three respects. It talks about the salvation of our body: 'For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed' (Rom 13:11)—the salvation of our body when the Lord comes. It talks about the salvation of the soul, as we've been thinking this morning. In 1 Corinthians 5:5, it talks about the salvation of the spirit: 'You are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.' So Scripture talks of salvation of body and of soul and of spirit. Presumably there are differences. We can think of the body in that sense as separate from, say, the soul or the spirit, whichever way you put it. Peter will tell you, 'I'm about to put off this tabernacle, this tent' (2 Pet 1:14).

Now in common parlance where Christians often talk about, 'his soul departed,' or, 'his spirit went to be with the Lord', people sometimes get a little bit worried. 'Which bit of me is going to be with the Lord when I die?' I take comfort in the way that the New Testament speaks. The writers don't say, 'My soul will be with the Lord,' or, 'My spirit will go to be with the Lord,' so much as they say, 'I will go.' Our Lord said to the dying thief, 'Today you will be with me in Paradise' (Luke 23:43). Paul says, 'My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better' (Phil 1:23). *I* will be with Christ. That's how the New Testament normally speaks.

I take it, however, we can exist outside the body. You say, 'Do you hold the spirit to be separate from the soul?' I would come back with another question. Are these separate entities, or are they two different aspects? Some have made a neat division and said with the body we're earth conscious, with the soul we're self-conscious and with the spirit we're God-conscious. Well that may be true. What I want to say is, are soul and spirit separate entities, or are they different aspects of the person, importantly different aspects or different components of the person, or however you put it? I'm not aware myself that Scripture discusses it in any great detail. Do you, sir, can you remember?

AUDIENCE: I'm just thinking that the soul and spirit are the same.

DWG: Are the same? Yes, some theologians have tried to say that soul and spirit are the same and they deny that there is such a thing as a soul independently of the spirit and body and, therefore, some of them go on to say the doctrine of what they call 'soul sleep': that when we die, we are then unconscious until the Lord comes and raises us from the dead, and they wouldn't agree that you are present with the Lord when you die. They talk about the soul being asleep, so to speak.

I myself would (1) confess ignorance, but (2) prefer to keep to what Scripture actually says. I do notice that while the Scripture talks of salvation in respect of the body, soul and spirit, normally in Scripture when these topics come up, it deals with two things—spirit and flesh, or body and soul. Those are the very frequent opposites in Scripture. Spirit and flesh,

they are opposites in one sense. Soul and body can be opposites, and normally it talks in pairs rather than in triplets. I think, therefore, in these things, we're perhaps wise to keep to the Bible's phraseology. If we develop a system on it, a sort of biblical psychology, we must be careful not to let our system go against any positive statement of Scripture. Look at Hebrews 4:12, where the word of God is said to be so sharp and powerful that it can discern, even to the division of soul and spirit. That must be a very difficult thing to do, if it takes something so sharp as the living word of God to do it. Anybody else got any views to supplement my ignorance?

AUDIENCE: Paul said to the Thessalonians, 'may your whole spirit and soul and body' (1 Thess 5:23). Yes?

DWG: Yes, it talks of the three. That is right. As I say, salvation is talked of in all three, so yes, I do believe in all three. I'm not a dualist in that sense.

AUDIENCE: I'm wondering, does it really matter in the end whether you're tripartite or dichotomy? Does it really matter?

DWG: I imagine that there are practical things involved here. When our Lord is talking to the woman at the well he said, 'God is spirit'. Not, 'God is a spirit', but 'God is spirit'. He didn't say, 'God is soul', he said 'God is spirit and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth' (John 4:24). That's what leads some people to say, 'It's by the spirit that we understand God. Who knows the things of man, save the spirit of a man which is in him. Even so, none knows the things of God, save the Spirit of God' (1 Cor 2:11, own trans.). It is at the spiritual level therefore that we know God, so you can say, yes, that is important. I have the notion that in the Old Testament, God does sometimes refer to himself as, 'My soul is weary with you' (Ps 119:28, own trans.), which is an interesting thing. If that is a part of the divine make-up, does God, who is spirit, have a soul as well? He doesn't have a body presumably, so we get in deep waters, don't we?

I think, however, it is of practical importance. You have in Greek the adjective *psuchikos*—*soulish*—and that is a very bad state to be. 'Soulish', not having the spirit. It is important to distinguish between things that are simply soulish and not spiritual. We can sometimes mistake the power of the Holy Spirit and we think it is working people up emotionally, and the worship is very much soul worship and not spiritual. Take, for instance, if I dare say this thing, you can get folks in their devotions, meditating upon a crucifix or a picture of Christ with all the gory wounds, and they can be very moved. One has to be careful that that is a true spiritual reaction and not just a soulish reaction. You can play upon people's souls, their emotions and their sensitivities and whatnot and get them to do all sorts of things. That may not necessarily be spiritual power.

Pagan religion is full of that kind of soulish stuff and the New Testament complains about some that are soulish, not having the spirit. That isn't to say soul is bad of itself, but it can go to the bad and be misused. We are to love the Lord our God with all our souls. God made us with emotions and loves and hates and so forth. Purified, they are to be used for God's glory, but presumably the Holy Spirit and our spirit should be dominant in our make-up.

Authority

AUDIENCE: You were talking about Christ giving the disciples authority and I've just been chatting to someone about this, and John 20:23, and just an explanation of that—if you forgive anyone his sins, they're forgiven. And also, we were reading in Matthew this morning about the binding and the loosing. It seems to be related in some way to the question of authority. Just an explanation of that.

DWG: Well shall we start with John 20? And your verses are verses 19–23, presumably. Our Lord appeared on the first day of the week to the disciples when it was evening. He said, “Peace be with you.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; and if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”

My approach to this would be, first to notice that this must be an exceedingly important thing. This ‘if you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; and if you withhold forgiveness, it is withheld’ must be so vastly important in itself. Secondly, I notice it is connected with their mission: ‘As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.’ It is, in the third place, a connection established between the apostles and Christ. How did they get this? He breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’ The connection, the authority, is the Holy Spirit given to them by Christ. That’s how it comes about, but what does it mean?

I would say that the best way to determine what it means is to read the Acts of the Apostles to start with. Here were the apostles sent by Christ, going out to the world. If this power of forgiving sin, so to speak, is so important a thing, do they show by their behaviour that they’ve understood it? Where do they exercise this power? That would be my question.

Some people have said that this power of binding and loosing of sins is the power the apostles had for disciplining the church. And they will quote you the story of Ananias and Sapphira from Acts 5, who lied to the Holy Spirit. Peter, speaking to them seriously in the name of God, denounced their sin of lying to the Holy Spirit, and they fell down dead. And people say, ‘There you are. There’s a case of the apostles using their power to bind instead of forgive.’ Well I would say that’s very interesting. Is that all it means? That is just one incident in twenty-eight chapters of the doings of the apostles as they went out on their mission, and I would say that it is serious, but that’s a very small thing if that’s what it means.

The other thing that glares at you from every page of Acts is that the apostles went everywhere, proclaiming to people the conditions upon which they could be forgiven. They started on the day of Pentecost, when the crowds came round after Peter’s sermon, and they were convicted by his preaching that they had murdered the Messiah. They were pricked to the heart and they came to Peter and said, ‘What shall we do?’ And Peter said, ‘I tell you what you’ll do, you’ll repent. You’ll be baptised in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. That’s what you’ll do.’ Now we are in danger of failing to see something at that point. If somebody asked you, ‘How can I be forgiven?’ you would say, ‘Well don’t take it from me. I’ll tell you what the Bible says. It says here in this epistle that you can have forgiveness through the blood of Christ.’ Isn’t that what you’d do?

That raises the question, who wrote the epistle? Well that was Peter. What authority had Peter to lay down conditions on which somebody can be forgiven, and what happens if folks aren't forgiven? Well that's exceedingly serious. Who says so? Well it says so in this epistle. But you say, 'Who wrote the epistle? Where did he get his authority from?' Do you see the point I'm making? If you ask me, I would refer to Scripture. If you asked Peter on the day of Pentecost, he didn't say, 'Well don't take it from me. Get me a Bible and we'll find out.' No. If you asked Peter on the day of Pentecost, 'How can I be forgiven?' he would stand there and tell you, 'What you'll do is you'll repent and be baptised in the name of Jesus unto forgiveness of sins.' If you were to say to him, 'And who are you to tell me that?' what would Peter say?

AUDIENCE: Go back to Christ.

DWG: Oh he would, yes. 'I'm an apostle of Jesus Christ.' That I take to be the point, therefore, of the ceremony in the Upper Room. They were now to be sent out. As God had sent Christ, these men, the apostles, were to be sent out. He didn't just broadly state, 'Whosoever sins you forgive, they're forgiven.' He first breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.' The authority that they had is because (1) they were appointed by Christ as apostles and (2) they were given the Holy Spirit to anoint them and inspire them in their ministry. And when they wrote, and when they spoke, they not only spoke with the power of the Spirit, but when they wrote, they were holy men of God, borne along by God's Holy Spirit. Therefore their words are authoritative, in the sense in which if you or I write a commentary: it might be good, but we're simply commenting on Scripture. We don't have that authority the apostles had. So that, I would want to say, is a very big thing and its dimensions are big enough to satisfy my mind that that is what Christ must have meant. Not just an odd case of church discipline, but the annunciation before the whole world of the conditions upon which people of every clime, tongue and nation can be saved. Peter doesn't simply quote the Bible. No, he gives it to you on his apostolic authority and he will tell you straight what will happen if you don't repent. Does that make any sense anyway? Whether it's right or wrong, does it make some sense?

AUDIENCE: Yes. The other verse that appears to tie in with that is the verse you were talking about yesterday in Matthew 10, where Jesus talked about those who receive you and believe you.

DWG: Yes, that's right. And our Lord in John, in the Upper Room ministry, so-called, he likewise says to them, 'Now he that receives you, receives me'. He's talking to his apostles. 'He who rejects you, rejects me. If they reject me, they reject my Father who sent me. If they reject you, they're rejecting me.' He's talking in the first instance to his apostles. It is true if you ask the apostles how you may be forgiven, they will quote substantiating authority: 'To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins' (Acts 10:43). They will quote the prophets in substantiating evidence but they're not afraid to say, 'I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you—you've fallen away from grace' (Gal 5:2-4, own trans.). They're conscious that they are apostles.

A question of days

AUDIENCE: Can I ask just one thing? I just wonder about the significance of this from what you were talking about this morning, where Matthew and Mark both talk about 'after six days', and Luke says 'after about eight days'. I just wondered in terms of inspiration of Scripture, what is the significance? I know it's not a contradiction, but why did Luke say 'after about eight days'?

DWG: That could be little more than the difference between the Greek and Hebrew way of counting time. Just as we have set periods, when we say, 'about ten days', what we mean is just a little bit more than a week. So it could be nothing more than that. If you want to see theological significance in it, you could say after six days, in the Jewish thinking, comes a seventh, which is a Sabbath. On the other hand, 'about eight days afterwards' can be theologically significant. It was in certain of the ritual sacrifices in Old Testament. Some courses were for seven days plus an eighth day, so that the eighth day was a kind of new beginning. So folks that want to see, or think there is, some theological significance in the difference would suggest that it's more than just a linguistic difference. This is the new kingdom, the eighth day. But I'd imagine when Luke says it's about eight days, he's using the Greek way of talking, rather than straight Hebrew.

4

Salvation*Justification by Faith*

Through the hour-and-a-half of your patience, ladies and gentlemen, I attempted to talk about one strand in the doctrine of salvation common to the Gospels and the epistles—the salvation of the soul, and you heard the results of my attempt. What I'd like to do in this remaining session is to consider what the Gospels might have to say about this second strand in the doctrine of salvation. We noticed this morning that the element of salvation which is regeneration—being born from above, receiving eternal life—is the part of the gospel that John concentrates on in his Gospel and then in his Epistle. The salvation of the soul is something that Peter concentrates on. They all share it of course. They all believe it, but Peter has more emphasis on this than he does, say, on justification. Peter mentions regeneration, of course, '[God] has caused us to be born again' (1 Pet 1:3), but Peter, more than the others, emphasizes the question of the salvation of the soul. I tried to point out this morning why that is so. It goes back to the time when Peter had to learn what, for him at the time, was a very severe and painful lesson. He had contradicted the Lord and it was the Lord in reply to Peter who began to talk about this question of the salvation of the soul.

Two gospels or one?

Now I want to say just a few things about the other strand in the doctrine of salvation, and that is the whole business of justification by faith, and consequent sanctification; and the relation of justification by faith to justification by works. That is a very big problem with a long history. Some scholars—and they're still alive today—would say that Jesus did not preach justification by faith. It is Paul with his Jewish legal, not to say legalistic, mind who concocted the idea of justification by faith and all these legal terminologies. Jesus preached a lovely gospel of the love of God, like the father of the prodigal son, who welcomed his son home and kissed him and gave him the robe, and didn't attempt to bring in any of these legal terminologies of justification. Whereas Jesus preached the loving heavenly Father, Paul somewhat perverted it, or at least reduced it into legal categories of justification and that type of thing. So they say that there are really two very different gospels in the New Testament. There's the gospel which the Lord Jesus preached, and you find that in our four Gospels; and then there's this other kind of gospel that Paul the ex-Pharisee concocted. Well I'm going to take one of the Gospels and see what it has to say on this matter of justification by faith, and what I'm going to do is to take Luke's Gospel, chapters 7–8.

Now actually I wrote a book² years ago that has this in it and if you've read it, find a comfortable chair and go to sleep, because I'm about to repeat it! Or else remember that you have a pressing appointment and that you have to leave at this moment! But if you stay, you'll have to bear repetition if you've heard it before. I refer now to Luke's Gospel, chapters 7–8. We first notice that this is a carefully designed section of his Gospel. Look at 7:1: 'After he had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum.' Luke shares with Matthew this same kind of literary device of dividing the narrative by inserting little remarks like that, which conclude one lot of episodes and introduce another fresh set of episodes. 'After he had finished all his sayings', because in chapter 6 that goes before there are sayings in the sense of moral teaching—what is called the Sermon on the Plain, Luke's equivalent of Matthew's Sermon on the Mount. And when our Lord had finished that moral and ethical teaching, he entered Capernaum.

Stories of salvation

Now there comes a series of stories, narrative incidents and some discussion with Pharisees, but largely narrative. There are some parables of teaching to the apostles, but the predominant narrative stories fill chapters 7–8. In chapter 9, the subject matter changes again. 'He called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim . . .' (9:1–2); so chapter 9 is going to talk about what they did. Now we can ask the same question as we asked yesterday over Matthew's section—is there a dominant theme or themes in these two chapters? There is of course, which you see by the recurrence of the Greek word *sózó*, and on occasion its compound, *diasózó*. The Greek word *sózó* has a range of meaning. It means basically *to save*, but what 'save' means depends on your context. You could use the word *save*, and particularly *diasózó*, if somebody fell in the river and you dived in and rescued him. You rescued him, you brought him through some disaster or potentially life-threatening situation. To save, to rescue.

If you were using it of a doctor, and you were suffering with some terrible disease and he came along and gave you the right medicine, he would, in Greek, *save you*, meaning *heal you*. Greek does have other words for *heal*, but it will sometimes use that word *sózó*, *save*, meaning 'to heal'. At the spiritual level, this is the verb—with its linked noun *sôtéria*, which means *salvation*—which is the common word used in the spiritual sense throughout Scripture, so you'll find the simple verb *sózó*, constantly used of salvation in the spiritual sense. Christ himself is *sôtér*, the Saviour.

This is a cluster of verbs, therefore, having all these connotations. The modern translations, quite rightly from one point of view, when they come across this word, translate it in different ways according to the context. Look at 7:2, where we read of the centurion whose beloved servant was sick and, when he heard about Jesus, he sent to ask Jesus to come and . . . do what? What do your Bibles say? Anybody got the King James Version?

² David Gooding, *According to Luke*, (Myrtlefield Expositions).

AUDIENCE: 'Heal'.

DWG: Heal, yes? All got heal? How difficult some of these modern translations make it for you!

AUDIENCE: 'Save'.

DWG: Save. My brother, you are to be commended! What do I mean? Well because in this section, we shall find there is an outcrop of this Greek verb *sózó*, and on one occasion *diasózó*, and it means basically 'to save'. In 7:3, because the man is ill, your modern translations say he asked the Lord Jesus to come and heal, which obscures from you that this is one in the list. There are going to be a whole number of them. Look at 7:50, 'your faith has . . .' done what to you? Even the modern translations will be right here, surely they will. Your faith has done what?

AUDIENCE: Saved you.

DWG: Saved you, amen! Then take 8:12: the devil comes along and snatches the seed away, 'so that they may not believe and be . . .'?

AUDIENCE: Saved.

DWG: Saved. Good stuff. Next, 8:36, 'the demon-possessed man was . . .'?

AUDIENCE: 'Cured'.

DWG: Cured. Now look at that. Even the Authorized Version has 'healed'. Oh, dear! What do the rest of you have?

AUDIENCE: 'Healed'; 'Cured'.

DWG: Healed and cured and . . .?

AUDIENCE: 'Made well'.

DWG: Made well. They're all correct. Unfortunately it's this word *sózó*. Aren't they making it difficult for you? Luke was wanting you to see how many times this same word recurs. He's going to give you a collection of illustrations, instances of salvation. Salvation is a very big term and how salvation affected them at different levels, but any Greek reader, even if he didn't pay much for his New Testament, would see that this is *sózó* all the way through, and he'd begin to realize that these are all stories about different aspects of the same thing; whereas your dear modern translations hide it from you. Next we come to 8:48, 'Your faith has . . .' done what? This is the woman with a haemorrhage. What had the faith done there?

AUDIENCE: Healed you.

DWG: Made you well, healed you. Anyway, never mind, you'll get this next one right. Look at 8:50: 'Only believe and she will be . . .'?

AUDIENCE: 'Healed'.

AUDIENCE: 'Made whole'.

DWG: Made whole. Fancy standing by a coffin and saying, 'Only believe and she will be made well.' The girl was dead. Be healed when she's already dead? The word is *sózó*, 'and she will be saved'. So it's simpler to know Greek sometimes than to know English!

AUDIENCE: What does the *dia* add to the word?

DWG: *Dia* means all sorts of things. It's like our English, isn't it? What does 'to get on' mean? You can have the word 'get', or you can use it with prepositions, 'to get in', 'to get out', 'to get on', 'to get up', 'to get over', 'to get down', 'to get through'. Marvellous language, English! Now tell me what 'to get on' means. What does 'on' mean when it's with the verb 'get'?

AUDIENCE: To succeed.

DWG: It means to succeed?

AUDIENCE: Climb on a horse.

DWG: He got on the horse? He succeeded on the horse?

AUDIENCE: To get on my nerves.

DWG: Get on my nerves.

AUDIENCE: Get on with your work.

DWG: Get on with it.

How do you manage? You must be very clever. I congratulate you all, you can read English and you can understand English, when a simple word like 'on' with 'get' can have all those different meanings! How do you know which meaning to apply at the right time? You say, 'It's simple.' Greek *dia* means *through* literally, to save someone through, so you would use it: 'There came a storm and the boat nearly foundered, but at last there came a tug and rescued us'; that is, 'saved us through the situation, brought us right through.' 'This man was on the point of death. Come and rescue him, save him through this life-threatening situation and bring him safely through.' In other words, save him, rescue him. Because it was a physical danger and he was ill, then they translated it *heal*. 'Thank Mr Jones, he's a very good doctor you know. I was at death's door and he brought me through.' Well anyway, you see what I mean. You have to be careful what phrases you use with compound verbs.

So then we are considering instances of salvation: the centurion's servant; and then, at the end of chapter 7, 'Your faith has saved you' — the woman in Simon's house (7:50). At 8:12 we learn of some people that don't get saved. We'll think of those that do, but 8:12 is 'the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved.' We'd better leave them out for the moment and focus on how people do get saved, and we come to the man with the demons, that is verses 34–35: The herdsmen fled when they saw what had happened and told it in the city, and the people came out. Verse 36: 'And those who had seen it told them how the demon-possessed man had been healed' — how he had been *saved*. The woman with haemorrhage, how was she saved? He said, 'Daughter, your faith has made you well [your faith has saved you]; go in peace' (8:48).

And then Jairus' daughter: "The people came to Jairus and said, "Don't trouble the master anymore. Your daughter is dead," but Jesus on hearing this answered him, "Do not fear, only believe, and she shall be saved"" (8:49-50). So Luke gives us a number of instances of Christ meeting people's needs and we notice that they all have this in common, that they are instances of salvation. And, having done that, we do what the medics call differential diagnosis. They were all saved, but did salvation mean exactly the same thing in each case, or were they different aspects of salvation? Taking it literally, for instance, what kind of salvation was it for the centurion's servant, 'who was sick and at the point of death, who was highly valued by him.' What was it salvation from?

AUDIENCE: Death.

DWG: Death. Salvation, yes, from death. The woman in Simon's house, saved from what? Saved from death? Salvation in what sense?

AUDIENCE: A sinful life.

DWG: A sinful life, yes, and anything else? What actually is said in the passage? Look at 7:47-49. What else did she get in salvation? Forgiveness of sins. 'Your sins are forgiven.' Explicitly said. That's not me putting it in: that's what the Scripture says. So saved from a sinful life and the key to it was the forgiveness. And what was the demoniac saved from?

AUDIENCE: From demon possession.

DWG: From demon possession. Then Jairus' daughter, she was saved from dying, was she?

AUDIENCE: She'd already died.

DWG: She'd already died. She wasn't saved from dying. What was she saved from then? Death, in the sense that . . .? Saved from death in the sense that she was raised to new life. Our Lord on that occasion described death as sleep—'she is not dead but sleeping' (8:52). Woken from the sleep of death. Different examples of salvation. I left out the woman with the issue of blood and you'll see why later on when we come to it. Here then, our list of instances, actual instances of salvation. They all have in common that it is salvation in some respect, and when you look at them, they are all different.

Physical miracles with spiritual meaning

Though our Lord's miracles were physical miracles, many of them became parables of spiritual things. When he met a man who was blind from birth (John 9) he gave him physical sight; then before that chapter is over, our Lord is pointing to the lesson that he can give people spiritual sight. When he multiplied the loaves and fishes and fed people physically, he then took the opportunity to talk to them about the fact that he was the bread of life spiritually. These stories of salvation were miracles at the physical level. Have they any spiritual meaning for us? Well let's begin to notice one or two things.

The first one, we would all agree, is salvation from dying. The servant was dying and our Lord was asked to come and save the man from dying. Now listen to the story. This isn't me preaching a sermon. 'When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the

Jews, asking him to come and heal his servant. And when they came to Jesus, they pleaded with him earnestly, saying, “He is worthy to have you do this for him, for he loves our nation, and he is the one who built us our synagogue” (7:3–5). So when these friends came to ask the Lord Jesus to save this man from death, they pleaded for this gift on the grounds of the centurion’s worthiness. ‘He is worthy that you should give him this gift of restored life on the grounds of his good deeds. He loves our nation and has built us a synagogue.’ Jesus went with them.

When he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to him, ‘Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. Therefore I did not presume to come to you. But say the word, and let my servant be healed’ . . . When Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, said, ‘I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith.’ (7:6–7, 9)

Now, please, I’m not preaching. This is what it says. This is Luke telling you the story. The man asked for the gift of salvation for his servant. The friends came and said he was worthy of the gift of salvation on the grounds of his love and his works; and the centurion, hearing that, sent other friends to say, ‘That’s absolutely nonsense, Lord. I’m not worthy, actually, and I don’t count myself worthy.’ That’s a nice distinction, isn’t it? Some people aren’t worthy but they do count themselves worthy. This man wasn’t worthy and he didn’t count himself worthy. ‘I’m not fit for you to come under my roof. I plead to you, but not on those grounds.’ What grounds then? ‘Speak only the word,’ said he, and our Lord’s comment was, ‘I have not found such faith.’ Any preacher preaching the story would emphasize that—it’s salvation from death, not by worth or works, but by faith. It’s in the text!

That story is followed by another story that doesn’t actually use the word ‘save’. This second story, beginning in verse 11, is peculiar to Luke and it’s introduced by the phrase ‘Soon afterwards’—note that phrase, we shall meet it again—‘he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him.’

As he drew near to the gate of the town, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow, and a considerable crowd from the town was with her. (7:12)

So he was actually dead. The centurion’s servant was dying, but this chap was actually dead. ‘And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, “Do not weep.” Then he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still’ (vv. 13–14). That awful procession to the grave, a dead man processing to the grave. That was stopped, ‘And he said, “Young man, I say to you, arise.” And the dead man sat up’ (vv. 14–15). Can you see that? He’s on this board and they’re carrying this board, and I expect he was covered with a cloth; and the Lord came alongside and touched the bier and stopped it—‘and the dead man sat up’, on the board, on the bier; he sat up beside Christ. And the Lord said, ‘Mother, I have done this great deed for you, and your boy is well. Now upon certain conditions, I’m prepared to do this for you. If you promise me that you’ll attend the synagogue every

Sabbath from now on, and never miss anything unless you're ill in bed and can't move. And on condition that you'll pay tithes, and on condition that you'll do this and that and the other, I'm prepared to raise your son from the dead and give him back to you.' No, he didn't. He stopped the bier, raised the dead to life—saved him, in other words—and he gave him back to his mother. You can see how those two stories are related. One man nearly dead, dying; the other already dead. The dead man, the only son of his mother, poor old girl. The centurion, a big, tough chap and pretty well paid, so he had enough money to build a synagogue for the Jews. You can tell the kind of cash he got for his services. And here was a widow. She had a husband once, to fend and fight for her. He died. She had an only son to look after her and fend for her. He died. Left a desolate widow, and the Lord gave him salvation from death, not by worth or works, but by faith. It was the gift of Christ. If I say to you, on the basis of these stories, that Luke is telling us the conditions upon which people were saved from death and given new life, and the conditions were these—not by works or merit, but by faith, and that not of themselves, it was the gift of God. Would you ever have heard those phrases anywhere else in the Bible? Where did you hear them elsewhere?

AUDIENCE: Ephesians 2:8–9.

DWG: 'For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not of your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.' And it's salvation from what in that particular context?

AUDIENCE: Death.

DWG: Read it aloud in a stentorian voice, sir. That's Ephesians 2, isn't it?

AUDIENCE: Yes. Ephesians 2:1: 'And you were dead in trespasses and sins.'

DWG: 'You were dead', yes, it's salvation from death. And Paul is discussing with you the conditions upon which we get this salvation from death, and it is . . . ?

AUDIENCE: Grace.

DWG: Yes. 'By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.' And then they say that Paul is making up a gospel that Christ didn't preach! Well of course not. You see the connection, don't you?

You'll think me fanciful here, but when it gets near lunch, like Peter, sometimes I fall into a trance, so you must forgive this next bit! One man was dying and the other was dead and the dead man was being carried out, dead, in that awful procession of death that leads to the grave. He was on the bier and when Christ gave him life, saved him from death, the dead man sat up. Does Paul know anything about sitting up anywhere in particular after you've been dead?

AUDIENCE: Ephesians 2:6: 'raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus'.

DWG: Yes, seated us with Christ. I often think what that would be like. I wouldn't mind it myself if it had that happy ending, to be dead on a bier and to sit up and find myself seated

at the side of Christ. That is the Christian Gospel. You could just read the verse, 'The dead man sat up', and make no comment at all about it; and go to Ephesians and read, 'God has not only given us new life in Christ and saved us from death, but has seated us with Christ in heavenly places.' And all of this is by his magnificent grace, not by worth, not by works, not by merit. That's what it means to preach the Bible, as distinct from making up a sermon about it. I've not made anything up. It's what Luke is saying.

Then he comes to another example of salvation at the end of the chapter—the woman in Simon's house. You know the story, she got forgiveness but listen to the detail for if we're preachers, we're meant to preach the whole story, and it goes like this:

And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, 'If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner.' (7:37–39)

To Simon's mind, if Jesus were a prophet he would know. Like Ahijah the prophet knew when Jeroboam's wife came to consult him about their child who was ill, and she dressed up, feigning herself to be some other woman (see 1 Kgs 14:2–6). God had a word in the prophet's ear before she arrived so when she came in, he said, 'I know you are Jeroboam's wife.' And Simon is saying, 'Yes, and if this Jesus were a prophet, he'd know that this woman is totally immoral and he wouldn't have her anywhere near him.'

If it hadn't been that the Lord was there, Simon, being a good Pharisee, would have kicked her out of the house forthwith. He wouldn't touch immoral women like that, and our Lord's answer? 'Simon,' he said, 'I've got something to say to you. There was a creditor and he had two debtors. One owed a vast sum and the other a tiny sum, and when they had nothing to pay with, he forgave them both. Tell me, Simon, which of those two will love him, their creditor, the more?'

Said Simon, 'It's obvious. The one who's been forgiven the more will love the more.'

Christ said, 'So do you hold that as a basic principle that the more a person has been forgiven, the more they will love?'

'Well of course it is.'

'Are you sure, Simon? Don't you rather think that the more a person loves, the more they will be forgiven?'

'No,' says Simon, 'of course not. If you owe a large sum to the bank manager, when you see him coming down the street, you run off round the side street. You don't come anywhere near him. You don't say, "I'll just see if I can make up my mind to love this chap and if I love him enough, he'll forgive me."'

I never knew a bank manager that would respond to love like that and forgive you one million pounds in the red just because you loved him! But if the bank manager should happen to forgive you, you would very likely feel gratitude and love: it's that way round. You don't love to get forgiven, but if you've been forgiven, you love. Forgiveness, therefore,

leads to love. Therefore love is the evidence that forgiveness has taken place. That's the way round it is and Simon thought that was simple. He couldn't make out why our Lord was wasting time on such obvious things.

Then Jesus said, 'Simon, when I came into your house, you didn't wash my feet, did you?' (the normal courtesy of the day to a visitor). 'You didn't bother about that, but this woman washed my feet with her tears. You didn't kiss me, did you, Simon?' (the oriental custom), 'but this woman has not ceased to kiss my feet. You didn't anoint my head with ointment, did you?' (an extravagant gesture of welcome to a visitor, but it was done). 'You didn't anoint my head but she has anointed my feet. I'm telling you, Simon, this woman has been forgiven. Her sins have been forgiven.' And those at the table said, 'Who is this that forgives sins? How can he say that? How does he know?'

Now you'll notice what Christ replied. He didn't say, 'You'll have to take my word for it, because I'm saying so.' Simon wouldn't have believed that. 'How do I know this woman's sins have been forgiven? You told me, Simon, that when somebody has been forgiven, they love. Look at her love, Simon. Didn't you say that love is an evidence that forgiveness has happened? I'm telling you, Simon, that her sins, and they were many, have been forgiven.' The Greek is a perfect tense—'have been forgiven'. 'And my evidence for the fact that she has been forgiven is this: that she loved much.'

If you're preaching that sermon, please make sure that you get it the right way round. For years, the Roman Catholic Bibles got it the wrong way round. They preached that you get forgiven if you love God. The way to get forgiveness is to love God, and if you love much, you'll be forgiven much—the very opposite of what the parable is saying. The debtors didn't get forgiven because they loved their creditor. They first of all got forgiven and that resulted in their loving. Christ is saying, 'I'm telling you this woman's sins have been forgiven. Not why have they been forgiven, but why do I say that she has been forgiven? How can I be sure she has been forgiven? What evidence have I to back home my statement that her sins have been forgiven? Well look at her love, Simon. You told me when somebody has been forgiven, it leads to love. She's loving. I'm telling you she's been forgiven. There is the evidence.'

Salvation by faith, but evidenced by works

But look at what's happening now. Salvation equals forgiveness, by grace of course, but it leads to love and love leads to works and devotion to the Saviour. You could imagine that the Lord could have extended that little word to Simon. He could have said, 'Simon, you're a very religious Pharisee. You objected to this woman being present in your house. Some of you men in this city use the services of a woman like that, and then on the Sabbath come to the synagogue. Of course you wouldn't have such women in your house, because you're very religious. If love for me is the evidence that forgiveness has taken place, is there any evidence in your life that you've ever been forgiven? For when I came in, you didn't wash my feet, nor give me a kiss, nor anoint my head. Is there any evidence in your life you've been forgiven, Simon? Religious, yes; but forgiven?'

Luke is a clever writer; only he tells you this story and we have to ask why Luke has put it there. Do you see what he's done? Whether you were noticing it or not, he's caught you by craft! The previous stories say that salvation is not by works, not by worth, and not by merit. It is by faith and it is the gift of God. Of course, forgiveness is by grace and through faith, but it leads to works and if the works aren't there, you could question whether the forgiveness has taken place. Luke puts both sides of the question and, not content with that he has another story here, the women that followed Christ from Galilee. You notice that only Luke has it. It comes at the beginning of chapter 8, and it is introduced by that same little phrase.

Soon afterwards he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means. (8:1-3)

These other women from Galilee were a very mixed bunch. One woman had been seriously demon-possessed. Another woman was the wife of Herod's household manager—that is, he was the chief, the major-domo of the palace. She was used to living at the top level of society, and she gave that up and followed the Lord with these other women, who provided for him out of their own pocket. Whatever made her do that? Well she wasn't trying to get salvation; she wasn't doing it to get forgiven. But when folks have been forgiven by the Saviour, it's incredible what they'll do for the Saviour.

It's not only emotional stuff. You could have said, 'Look at that woman at his feet, weeping all those tears. That's only the same old thing that she was doing before, expressing herself in different guise. That's emotionalism and I'm suspicious about those physical contacts and washing his feet and all that. You call that being saved? Well I don't like that.' Well perhaps you'll like this then. There was nothing emotional about the service of Chuza's wife. This was hard slog. Following that apostolic band and our Lord himself through the dusty roads of Palestine in the heat and what have you; and discretely at a distance seeing to the physical and practical needs of the apostolic band, when she could have been in her feather bed in the palace with all the luxuries of the day. That's a very balanced view of salvation, isn't it?

Let's just briefly look at the other stories. There is the storm on the lake, and our Lord rose and rebuked the storm (see 8:22-24). The word for salvation isn't used on that occasion. It was a rescue nonetheless—salvation from the physical powers of the universe. The demoniac—salvation from spirit powers. Jairus' daughter—salvation from the sleep of death. The centurion's servant and the widow's son—salvation from death and the giving of new life. We saw the counterpart in Ephesians 2. Then comes salvation in the sense of forgiveness, which leads to works: that puts the balance to it.

The storm—salvation from physical danger

Salvation from the storm, from the physical powers of the universe—as we said yesterday when this incident came up in Matthew—isn't there to tell us that no believer will ever drown at sea, or be lost in an air crash. It was the demonstration that the man who was sleeping in the boat was the Lord of nature and he controls the winds and the waves. It is the basis of our certainty that:

Neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom 8:38–39)

The demoniac—salvation from the power of Satan

In the case of the demoniac, it was salvation from the very power of Satan. We may not have been demon-possessed, but Ephesians says that we were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind, who once followed the prince of the power of the air (see Eph 2:2–3). We were in the kingdom of darkness, all of us. To preach forgiveness to the demoniac would almost be a mockery if you couldn't deliver him from the power of Satan, so there is that aspect of salvation. How was he saved? That was what the people from the town were interested to know. The reformers, the social workers and friends had all tried to chain him up and restrain him, but he'd torn the chains asunder and he lived in the tombs. He was melancholy; he was morbid; he cut himself; he couldn't be restrained; he wore no clothes; he had no shame; he was desperate. But now he was sitting clothed and in his right mind at the feet of the Saviour, and the people from the town were agog to know how it was done.

What would be your recipe for it? You'll find in those circumstances there are a lot of recipes. And the bystanders who had seen it all happen told those that came out of the city how it was done. They said, 'Jesus commanded the demons to come out and they went into the pigs and the pigs rushed down into the lake and they drowned.' Well that's a way of getting rid of demons, I suppose. The Lord could have got hold of the demon-possessed man and put him in the lake: that would have got the demons out of him. Unfortunately that would have drowned the man. So the demons were put into the lake. I should get into deep water if I started expounding that one—I'd better not do that, but something about being drowned in the water! I'm going to leave this one, because you're going to tell me what salvation that represents. If you were going through Romans, you would see that you're first of all justified by faith and given new life. It's not by works but by faith and it is the gift of God. That's Romans 3–4 and the beginning of 5, and then Romans 6 would talk about being delivered from the dominion of sin and the dominion of death.

Salvation from the sleep of death

And then the last aspect of salvation—salvation from the sleep of death. You notice the Christian terminology—'not dead, but sleeps'. Listen to the Lord talking to Jairus. They came and said, 'Jairus, your daughter is dead. Don't trouble the master; she's gone too far,

she's dead.' And the Lord Jesus said to Jairus, 'Only believe and she shall be saved.' Salvation from death.

For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. (1 Thess 4:14)

When will it happen? It's a lovely little story. Here was Jairus whose girl was desperately ill on the point of death, so he came full steam ahead to the Lord, to ask the Lord to come to his house to save the girl. The Lord began to come, but a great crowd had gathered around him and there came this woman with a haemorrhage; she came up behind him and she touched the hem of his garment and she was healed. The Lord stopped and said, 'Who touched me?' And Peter said, 'Lord, be realistic; there's a thousand folks around you, what on earth do you mean, "Who touched me?"' He said, 'Yes, somebody touched me.' Jairus was standing there, probably fuming, 'Lord, come on, my daughter is dying. If you don't soon come, she'll be dead. Bother the woman: she's had this twelve years and she could come tomorrow. But my daughter's on the point of death. Lord, come.' But still the Lord stayed. He said, 'Somebody touched me', so then the poor woman had to come in front of all and confess it. And Jairus was in a panic, 'Why doesn't he get on with the job and come?'

Not at a distance—the Lord will come

I've got a lovely answer. In that first story, the centurion saw that Jesus didn't need to come to his house: he could heal at a distance. The Lord could have said to Jairus, 'Don't worry, I don't need to come to your house.' And then he could have spoken the word at a distance and the girl would have recovered. But he didn't. Why didn't he heal her at a distance like he healed the centurion's servant at a distance? Why did he have to come to the house?

AUDIENCE: There's a spiritual lesson there.

DWG: Yes, so there is, and when it comes to those that sleep in Jesus, will the Son of God sit on the throne of heaven and give the word of command, and stay there, and the dead in Christ will rise? How does it happen?

AUDIENCE: He's coming back.

DWG: Ah, his coming.

For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven. (1 Thess 4:14–16)

The Lord himself will come. We join with the early Christians in their Aramaic when they said, *Marana tha—marana*, our Lord; *tha*, come, please come. The hope of the church in all ages is that Christ is coming. The dead in Christ will not be raised until he comes. He won't remain at a distance and do it. He must come, and here is our Lord illustrating it, as he did with Martha and Mary in Nazareth. It's no coincidence that this is the last example of salvation in this series. This is Luke giving you his doctrine of salvation and putting together

all sorts of incidents. Some he shares with other gospel writers and some only he has, but putting them together in a very carefully selected series to show you the gamut, the whole array of salvation, from first to last.

The centurion whose servant was dying and the widow of Nain's son was dead, we found to be a lesson how we are spiritually dead in trespasses and in sins, as we read in Ephesians 2. And God, through Christ, gives us new life. He quickens us, he makes us alive, and he seats us in the heavenlies with Christ. Already we are seated in the heavenlies with Christ, at that spiritual level. And it's not by works; it is by faith. It's not by merit; it is the gift of God.

For Jairus's daughter, it is being raised from the sleep of death, physical death of course, not spiritual death, and it's a picture of those who died before the Lord came. She died before the Lord could get there. I have to tell you, ladies and gentlemen, that if the Lord doesn't come for the next seventy-five years, it's most likely that most of you will be dead. When our loved ones get sick and we pray the Lord to heal them, sometimes he heals them by his grace and his miraculous power. Sometimes he heals them through the medics. Sometimes he doesn't, and if he doesn't come within the next seventy-five years, we shall all be dead. No good fooling ourselves, is it?

Do you mind that? No, of course you don't. There are thousands and millions of folks who need to hear the gospel and be saved. So if the Lord gets held up, dealing with these women with haemorrhages and things, and all sorts of sinners of every kind all round the world, and I reach the age of one hundred and twenty and die, what does it matter? For the Lord will come one day and raise his people from the sleep of death. Sleep of course is the word that Christians used, and our Lord used it of death. I always thought the word *cemetery* is a nice word. It is the English transliteration of *koimeterion*, 'cemetery', and it means a place where people sleep. Not exactly the Greek word for a bedroom, but it means the same thing. It's a place where people sleep.

There are many other wonderful things about those stories. If not today, then perhaps tomorrow you'll come back at me and you'll say, 'But you kept on missing out that one about the haemorrhage.' What aspect of salvation is that? Well you'll tell me tomorrow, won't you?

AUDIENCE: A process. She'd had it for quite a long while. Something that was going on longer than it was supposed to.

DWG: Yes, draining away all her strength. She'd spent all her living, her belongings, on the medics. She couldn't be healed and it was draining away all her strength. Talk about the weakness of the flesh, but that's another story. The storm on the lake was an acute trouble: it came up suddenly. But this was chronic. The haemorrhage had been there all those twelve long years. Jairus's daughter was acute: she was on the point of death. He came that he might awake her out of sleep, he said. He was asleep in the boat. They had to wake him up. Odd these things are, aren't they?

Parallels and contrasts

It will perhaps help us in our further thinking about the elements of these two chapters if we set them out in a list. We'll notice that they form two groups of four, like this³:

FIG 1

Group One:

1. Salvation from death: a gift to faith—centurion's servant and widow's son (7:2–17).
2. False expectations of salvation and rejection of the Saviour (7:18–35).
3. Salvation and the love of the forgiven—woman in Simon's house and women who serve (7:36–8:3).
4. The mysteries of the kingdom relating to salvation (8:4–21).

Group Two:

5. Salvation from the physical elements—storm on the lake (8:22–25).
 6. Salvation from spirit powers and rejection of the Saviour—man of Gadara (8:26–39).
 7. Salvation from the waste of life's vital forces—woman with the haemorrhage (8:40–48).
 8. Salvation and a 'secret' raising of the dead—Jairus's daughter (8:49–56).
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The third item in the first group is the woman in Simon's house. Over in the other group, the third story is about the woman with the haemorrhage. It might help you to notice what those stories have in common. When our Lord was at dinner with a man called Simon, in his house, there came a woman behind him who fell at his feet and Simon said, 'If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what type of woman this is who is touching him.' Well she's a sinner and to Simon's mind, the Lord didn't know.

As he was going to Jairus' house, there came a woman behind who touched him, and he stopped and said, 'Who touched me?' Peter and the rest said, 'Don't be silly, all the crowd is around you; what do you mean, "Who touched me?"' 'Oh,' he said, 'but yes, someone did touch me. I perceive that power has gone out of me.' He did know who touched him. Funny that, isn't it? Two stories, two women that came up behind him and touched him; and the question is raised whether he knew. In the first case, it was whether he knew what kind of a woman it was that touched him: his moral perception was in question. 'He should have known what kind of a woman this is who is touching him, for she is an immoral woman.' In the second case he knew who had touched him, her identity. So tell me, why did he make this woman confess?

AUDIENCE: You have to confess your sin.

³ Based on: David Gooding, *According to Luke: The Third Gospel's Ordered Historical Narrative*.

DWG: The suggestion here is, you have to confess to be saved. Do you have to confess before you're saved, to be saved, or do you get saved and then confess?

AUDIENCE: No, Romans 10:10 starts with believing in your heart and then confessing.

DWG: With your mouth, yes. When was the haemorrhage stopped with this woman? After she confessed, or before?

AUDIENCE: Before.

DWG: Before, yes. 'Immediately the fountain of her blood was stopped.' But he made her confess. That's an interesting story, isn't it?

Other similarities

Looking at our list again, we see right at the beginning there were two men. One was dying and the other was dead, says Luke, and the dead man, the widow of Nain's son, was the only son of his mother. And at the end, there are two women, and one was dying by inches and the other, Jairus' daughter, was dead; and the dead girl, says Luke, was the only daughter of her father. Curious, isn't it, those little details? Perhaps they don't mean anything, but the fact is that they're there. Luke is an artist, you know: he sees that kind of thing and thus he brackets the stories together. Marvellous examples of Christ's salvation.

Of course, Luke was Paul's travel companion. He heard Paul preach the great gamut of salvation, such as Paul writes for us in Romans. Justified by faith without the works of the law; by grace you are saved; it is through faith. Marvellous stuff. And then the evidence of salvation—leading to good works.

Then in the man of Gadara we see salvation from the grip of the devil, from the dominion of sin. The woman with the haemorrhage illustrates another truth about what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh. How do we get over that trouble: what is it that sets us free from the law of sin and death? 'The law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus' (Rom 8:2). That gets over this weakness of the flesh.

And finally, Luke would have heard Paul many times talk about the second coming of Christ. 'For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed' (Rom 13:11). 'We wait eagerly for . . . the redemption of our bodies' (Rom 8:23)—like Jairus's daughter.

So Paul and Luke do preach the same gospel. Paul delineates the theory. Luke will give you examples of it.

Salvation—Further Discussion

Based on the 'Salvation' Stories in Luke 7–8

It's good to see the discussion. I'm interested to hear your contributions. It would appear that there is indeed a sequence through the stories. The first one was salvation from death: one man was dying and the other was dead—the centurion's servant and the widow of Nain's son. A twin story, they put two sides to the story. The centurion, a very capable army officer, quite wealthy by current standards, able to do many good works and had even built a synagogue. It was on the grounds of those many works and those merits that his friends claimed this salvation for the servant, from Jesus. The widow, by contrast—and Luke is especially interested in widows: he has more widows in his Gospel than any other gospel writer—having lost her husband and now her only son, had no means of support in life. She couldn't presumably build synagogues or anything else. So it doesn't matter whether you have many works or no works: at this level, salvation is a gift.

That's not us applying it: the actual story is telling you that. The friends came and said, 'He's worthy that you should do this. Look what he's done.' But the centurion himself said, 'I'm not worthy. I don't even count myself worthy for you to come under my roof. Speak only the word.' And our Lord replied, 'I've not found such faith.'

In the second story, when he raised the young man, he gave him back to his mother and we noticed the similarity of phrasing in Ephesians 2:8–9, where it says that salvation is 'by grace . . . through faith and not of your own doing. It is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.' And we saw that the actual strand of salvation which Paul is talking about in Ephesians 2:1 is that you were dead in trespasses and in sins, and God has made you alive—in other words, a salvation from death. Now Luke's story was salvation from physical death, but Ephesians 2 is talking about salvation from spiritual death.

We made the point yesterday that many of the physical miracles of Christ become, even in the Gospels themselves, signs and pictures of a higher level. So the blind man that got his sight is used in John 9 as a picture of the fact that we're spiritually blind and Christ can give us spiritual sight. When our Lord multiplied the bread and fed the crowds, it was physical bread but it becomes a picture of our Lord as the spiritual bread. Christ saving men from dying and from death at the physical level becomes a picture, therefore, of salvation from death at the spiritual level. And then we notice that this story is the first in Luke's collection, which becomes significant here because if you're talking about salvation, the first thing an unregenerate person needs from salvation is life. If folks are dead, you don't get very far forward in salvation unless you can get them alive! It's no accident that this one is first in the

process: it's life that people need. 'They're dead in trespasses and in sins'. Other things they need—such as forgiveness—but life is the number one.

Then we notice that the story of Jairus' daughter was about salvation from death and we ask ourselves, is that therefore giving the same lesson as the first two stories? The widow of Nain's son was dead. Jairus' daughter was dead. If you were preaching on it, or taking your Bible class, you could preach a jolly good sermon and make the point that folks are dead in trespasses and in sins—this is the diagnosis, ladies and gentlemen, if you listen to Scripture. What's wrong with mankind in general? Well there are ten thousand things wrong with them, but God's diagnosis is the absolute basic thing that's wrong with them. They're dead and the very stories are pointing to the diagnosis and showing what Christ can do about it. He can give us spiritual life, and the stories tell you what the terms are.

Having preached a marvellous sermon on that and been congratulated by the congregation, then you come to the last one; will this just be repetition? Jairus' daughter was dead and Christ can give you life. How do you get that? By being born again? Is that what the story is saying? Well no. It is salvation from death. They came and said, 'Your daughter is already dead. Don't trouble the master', but Christ turned round and said, 'Only believe and she shall be saved.' This one isn't an illustration of salvation from spiritual death but an illustration of our eventual salvation from the sleep of physical death. Remember, we saw the Lord saying, 'She's not dead but sleeping.' It's still just an illustration, because Jairus' daughter, being raised from the dead, wasn't given a glorified body like our Lord's resurrection body. She was not given a body of glory like we shall have one day when the Lord comes. She presumably died again later on, so this was a revivification, like Lazarus, who came out of the tomb.

When Lazarus was raised out of the tomb, he didn't have a glorious body. Notice too the difference between his resurrection and our Lord's. When our Lord rose from the dead, nobody needed to roll away the stone to let him out. When the angels rolled away the stone for the women, the body was already gone. And when our Lord rose from the dead, nobody needed to help him to take the grave clothes off, whereas with Lazarus, they had to take off the grave clothes. Why? Because Lazarus' resurrection was a revivification. It wasn't the same thing as the resurrection of our Lord and our resurrection when the Lord comes, but Lazarus' resurrection was a sign of that bigger thing, and so was this one.

We notice another difference between these two stories. In the first story, the centurion said to the Lord, 'You don't even need to come to my house. You can speak the word at a distance and give my servant life.' That is true at the spiritual level. Christ does not have to come down from heaven to give a sinner new life and to regenerate somebody. He can speak the word. It's done by his word. But with Jairus' daughter, our Lord didn't do it at a distance. There's all the drama of the story. He was held up on the way and Jairus was fuming about this stupid woman who was holding things up, and why didn't the Lord come more quickly? But the Lord didn't speak a word at a distance, either to save her from dying or to raise her from the dead. He had to come and, explicitly, he said, 'She's not dead but sleeping.' That is the last story in the series because this is a picture of the redemption of our bodies. 'Only believe and she will be saved.'

Since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. (1 Thess 4:14)

We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye . . .

For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised. (1 Cor 15:51–52)

The woman in Simon's house

In the case of the woman in Simon's house, we're not left to make up our minds about it. It was a question of forgiveness. The question of forgiveness is not raised in those first two stories. Because of the nature of the sin, Simon, a respectable Pharisee, took the attitude of many. She wasn't welcome in decent society, not with her way of going on. Well, not until she could be forgiven. Could the chains that held her to a past manner of life be broken? In Greek, one of the words for forgiveness is *aphesis*, which means a *release*. The woman was released from the guilt of her past and able to be brought back into decent society. This is salvation in the sense of forgiveness.

Salvation from physical powers

With the storm at sea, the peril came from the physical powers. Our Lord demonstrated himself to be master of wind and wave. In Christian life and indeed in Christian service, we shall need to be brought to conviction that our Lord, who has saved us and forgiven us, is also Lord of creation. If you're going to be an Apostle Paul and twice in your life be down in the sea, holding on to a bit of old wood for two or three days in the Mediterranean on a boat that's going down; and in a storm for a couple of weeks; and facing all the perils of travel and the peril of disease, you'll need a tremendous conviction that the Lord you serve is in fact the Lord of creation. He controls wind and wave. That's not to say that no believer will ever drown. It is to say that no believer will ever drown because the Lord happened to be asleep. And if we drown it's because he, in his sovereign will, allowed it. But we know that:

Neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom 8:38–39)

It's a magnificent message. It's no fairy tale: it comes to the base of our Christian faith. The atheist doesn't mind if you privately comfort your soul with such thoughts when you go to bed. Children do it with little stories read out of a book, or you read them little stories out of the Bible to comfort them from ghosts and things that go bump in the night. The scientist likewise won't mind, but in his heart he despises it of course, because he doesn't believe there's anybody in charge of the universe. His atheism lands him in absolute hopelessness. Man is a prisoner in a material world that ultimately is non-intelligent, with no purpose, no plan, no nothing, and the end of life is just that. Life is, in the terms of the French philosophers, absurd. This incident that proclaims our Lord to be master of wind and wave, is not some little story made up to comfort us. It's the reality, and nowadays ever more so, it is the difference between the atheist interpretation of the universe and the Christian.

Salvation from spiritual powers

If you were diagnosing the demoniac's need, he was like everybody else—dead in trespasses and in sins; and like everybody else, he needed forgiveness. We all need the whole lot. But if you were dealing with a demoniac, perhaps the first thing you would mention to him wouldn't be the need for new life or for forgiveness. There's this other great problem: his own spirit has been overmastered by a legion of demons. There too the detail of this story is very apposite. The story will raise the question of how he was saved from the power of demonic spirits. And in the process, the Lord did a lovely, delightful, but absolutely apposite thing: he said to the man, 'What is your name?'

Particularly amongst the Semitic people, where names mean things, this is a very evocative question. The man didn't reply, 'John,' or, 'Thomas,' or whatever name had been given him by his loving parents—the name that represents all he is and his personality in particular. Asked, 'What is your name?' he replied, 'Legion'. Oh, dear. There's a personality swamped and in the process of being pulled to pieces. Personality will perish if it's not saved, under these forces. And you watch our Lord restoring a person's personality. That's a delightful thing that Christ does. You could think about drug addicts and alcoholics and all these other folks, or people that have such outrageous tempers that it turns them into furious beasts; and underneath there's a human personality that's being pulled apart by sin. What they need is not merely forgiveness but the deliverance of their personality, their person.

As I said yesterday, the vast majority of men and women on the earth are not demon-possessed. It's good to get these things in proportion. But what is true of every single person on earth, according to Ephesians 2:2 once more, is that they were 'following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience'. I was in Czechoslovakia, both before the walls came down and after. When the walls came down, they were able to have visiting preachers stay in one place for a series of lectures, whereas before, you were only allowed one night in one place with permission for each individual place. You had to get permission separately for wherever you were and then give a report on what you said, which was used to evangelize the communist officials! Anyway, the first time they were allowed to have me talk for several sessions in one place, they set the topics and one of the first things they wanted to know was about demon possession. I said to the dear folks, 'Well yes, I'll say what I can, but one thing we need to guard against is getting things out of proportion.'

According to the Acts of the Apostles, five thousand were saved—three thousand on the day of Pentecost, and some more later on, so they came to five thousand a day or two afterwards. A tiny minority, if any, of those had been demon-possessed, but they were all in the grip of Satan. The whole wide world, everybody outside of Christ, is in the grip of Satan, in the power of darkness. We shouldn't forget that. We need to be delivered, and it's no good preaching forgiveness unless you can also preach a gospel that can deliver people from the power and the domination of sin. So these stories aren't repetition but are illustrating different aspects of salvation—we can be delivered from the power and domination and dominion of sin.

The woman with the haemorrhage

That leaves us with this woman with a haemorrhage. It is very important to observe the detail, as this could help us decide what aspect of salvation this story illustrates. In the other stories we have seen an illustration of salvation from spiritual death, an illustration of deliverance from the power of Satan and the domination of sin and, in the final one, the coming of Christ to raise us from the sleep of death. It's good to preach your stories. Stories are a marvellous way of conveying profound truth. So when we come to this one with all the detail, what element of salvation is involved? Though she's in danger of death, it's not repeating the first one—the centurion's servant—so what is it?

AUDIENCE: It has to be the power of sin then, in the sense that Christ has dealt with sin and delivered us from the whole dominion of death, but we're still left with the Romans 7 principle of sin within us—with which we all struggle.

DWG: Yes, good, that's right. Let's hold on to those insights. If you were to set alongside these stories (see Fig 1, page 67) those key chapters of Romans where Paul is speaking of the key aspects of salvation, story 1 will be Romans 3, and story 3 will be Romans 4—David describes the delightfulness of the man who has been forgiven; Romans 6 and 7 will talk about the domination of sin—as in story 6; then Jairus's daughter will be Romans 8, and our bodies redeemed and nature delivered from the bondage of corruption: we're waiting for the redemption of our bodies at the Lord's coming. Does Romans 8 know anything about this, separate from these others?

AUDIENCE: The spirit of life which Christ gave us.

DWG: The spirit of life in Christ, yes. We observed here that the woman with the haemorrhage had to touch Jesus and, 'power has gone out from me', said he. Yes, the power of Christ transmitted. She touched him that the power of the blessed Lord Jesus might stream through her. The woman in Simon's house touched the Lord, but it wasn't quite the same thing. She touched the Lord simply in gratitude for the fact that she'd already been forgiven. But this woman touched the Lord and it was that contact which brought the Lord's power streaming out through her. It's a very interesting notion.

Somebody else observed that this woman's problem was not simply a physical thing, because by its very nature she became ceremonially unclean, so she wouldn't be allowed in the synagogue. She would be cut off from a great deal of social contact because, in Jewish thought, she carried ceremonial uncleanness. And of course, in Jewish thought, when she came up and touched Christ, she defiled him, which is one of the reasons why it was important to get her to confess that she was now healed, because our Lord supported Old Testament regulations. So she was not only very ill, with life ebbing away, but she was causing spiritual defilement, ceremonial defilement wherever she went.

Now the Bible does talk in other places of that kind of defilement. Listen to Hebrews 12:15: 'That no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled'. Sometimes there erupt in a church things that can defile a congregation of believers, a root of bitterness. I wonder could one go further? If you're going to take Romans, the phrase I would choose, I think, is the one that tags on to the sentence you've mentioned, in that the law was weak through the flesh. Not that it was weak through the devil, but that it

was weak through the flesh; and now here, the cure of that is that 'the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death' (Rom 8:2)—that principle that sin leads onwards to death. The law could never set me free from that. A simple command could never do it. Why couldn't it? Not that there was anything wrong with the law, but the problem lies with the weakness of the flesh.

I wonder whether one can go further. At the physical level, the woman's problem was that processes of the body which are normal and healthy and were meant eventually for the whole system of the reproduction of life, had now got out of hand and were killing the dear lady, absolutely tearing her life from her. There are other such processes in us—psychological processes as well as physical, but they are psychosomatic. They are processes which were designed by the Creator for life, but which can get out of hand, and when they do, they can tear us to pieces. Fear is one of them. Fear is a jolly good thing—invented by the Creator and meant to protect us. You watch a little bird out on your bird tray there, eating the nuts. He has one look to the right, one look to the left, eats a nut, then looks round again. In that sense, he's full of fear. That's what protects the bird. That's not unhealthy, that's jolly good.

We are meant to have fear. There are some folks who say that if you're a believer, you're not afraid of dying. I'd like to get those preachers who talk like that and put them in the middle of a field with a raging bull six yards behind them, coming at about forty miles an hour and see whether they're afraid of dying or not! They wouldn't think. Nature would take over. They would run like they'd never run before and jump a five-bar gate even if they'd never jumped an inch before in their lives, because fear would take over. It's a mercy, isn't it? It was meant to be there to preserve us. When they got to the other side of the gate, they'd nearly collapse and their legs would go all jelly. All the physical mechanisms in the body have drained their energy: now that the danger has passed, they nearly collapse, because the energy has gone. Fear is good, but it can get out of hand and lead to worry and all sorts of things which, instead of preserving us, destroy us.

Anger is another one. It is right that we get angry, but alas, our anger is often perverted and becomes bad temper and loss of control, and can destroy us. It would be a misdiagnosis to confuse that with the power of Satan. You find some dear soul that's worried stiff and can't sleep at night, and is insomniac and is losing weight and can't stop worrying, or has a phobia or something that's tearing them to pieces. If you tell them that's the devil, the shock of it would make the fear ten times worse. I have them come to see me and have to deal with them sometimes. But this is weakness through the flesh. Our whole make-up has been damaged by sin, and the Lord can put it right while others can't. The spirit of life in Christ Jesus can come and deal with those things.

The order of the stories

We started yesterday discussing these things in a very simple way, looking at the word *save* and noticing how you get many instances of salvation—translated differently in your English versions, but all instances and different connotations of salvation. Then we asked whether they were all the same. No, they weren't. They were obviously different, and that set us thinking that this is a collection of stories by Luke, illustrating all sorts of aspects of

salvation. And now we notice that they are in order. If you were preaching them, you'd preach Jairus's daughter last, because this is the great goal. Let's look at the detail, using the list and the two groups of stories that we noted yesterday (see Fig 1, page 67), and just let me do a bit of a demonstration that the detail itself is carefully done and is significant.

We begin with the centurion's servant plus the widow of Nain's son. Why do I put them together? Well because of that phrase in 7:11: 'Soon afterwards', and because also, in our study of the individual examples of salvation, we found how those two stories go together. They're twin stories—the centurion with all his works, the widow in all her helplessness, the subject of death. The centurion is not by merit or worth, it's not by works; it is through faith. Deliberately said, 'I've not found such faith.' And the widow of Nain completes the picture of God's free gift of life—'[he] gave him to his mother' (v. 15).

John the Baptist

Then there comes a big paragraph of discussion, from 7:18 onwards, about John Baptist and his baptism. The disciples of John told him of all these things and John sent two of his disciples to the Lord, saying, 'Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?' In reply our Lord said to the crowd, 'What did you go out into the wilderness to see?' (v. 24). He began to get at the consciences of the crowd, because initially they had gone out to John in their thousands and been baptised by him, but now those same people who had welcomed the forerunner were rejecting the Lord Jesus, and our Lord gets at their consciences. 'Not so many months ago, thousands of you went out into the wilderness, didn't you? Tell me, as a matter of interest, what did you go out into the wilderness to see? You went out to see a reed blown with the wind, did you? Well, hardly. Who goes out into the wilderness to see reeds? There are thousands of them. What did you go out to see? You went out to see a man clothed in soft clothing, did you? Well of course you didn't. They that wear splendid clothing are in kings' courts. What was it that took you out into the wilderness?' Well they went out to see John the Baptist, because they really believed he was the fulfilment of Isaiah 40.

What has gone wrong now then? If they went out to see John and many of them were baptised by him, why didn't they accept Christ? He's getting at the crowd's conscience, and then he goes on to talk about what had happened, and that there was none greater than John.

(When all the people heard this, and the tax collectors too, they declared God just, having been baptized with the baptism of John, but the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.) (7:29–30)

So this question of the baptism of John becomes now the centrepiece of our Lord's great long discussion with the crowd. Some of them were baptised by John and were now rejecting Christ. Alas, others refused John and refused his baptism and rejected the counsel of God against themselves. They rejected John because they didn't like his preaching of the wrath of God. John was quite a loud preacher and, in great stentorian tones, he enjoined the people to flee from the wrath to come. When some of the Pharisees came, he spoke very

bluntly. 'Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?' he said. They didn't like that kind of preaching. The funny thing was that when Jesus came, he didn't come hammering away at the wrath of God, so to speak. He preached the forgiveness of sins. They didn't like that either. Strange that, isn't it?

You'll find the same syndrome now. Some people don't like the preaching of the wrath of God. 'We like to preach the love of God. Isn't the love of God so wonderful? So loving. He sent his Son and he died for us that we might have eternal life and have forgiveness.' And if you should ask,

'Are you sure of forgiveness?'

'Nobody can be sure of forgiveness.'

'Well, God isn't all that loving then.'

'We have to wait until the final judgment before we know'.

'Really? You suppose God is so loving that he'll keep you waiting until the final judgment to know whether you are accepted with him or not? Well he isn't all that loving then.'

Isn't that a strange syndrome? That's what our Lord is pointing out to these folks.

Forgiveness and devotion

Next we come down to verse 36 and the woman in Simon's house: that fills the rest of chapter 7. And then there are some other women from Galilee at the start of chapter 8. Why tag them on? Because of the same phrase, 'Soon afterwards', and we saw, in our thinking about salvation, that these women are part of the same story. Where there has been forgiveness there is love and the woman in Simon's house showed her love in personal devotion to the Lord in the more emotional side of devotion. She wept and washed his feet with her tears; she anointed his feet with ointment, she wiped them with the hair of her head.

Yes, but that would need to be supplemented, wouldn't it? True gratitude for forgiveness will lead to love, but not just expressed in the emotional sense. These women, who had been forgiven and delivered—one of them at least from the palace of Herod—showed their love and gratitude to Christ by sheer hard slog and work. They followed him in his evangelistic campaigns at a discrete distance, and ministered to him and all the apostles from their substance. It's not just emotion: so they go together.

Parables of the kingdom

Now at number four on our list there are the great parables of the kingdom, and the secrets, the mysteries of the kingdom. 'To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God' (8:10). The parables go on right down to verse 21, where he talks about his mother and his brothers. That is the family relationships and the effect of the discipleship of Christ on family relationships.

Remaining stories

Lastly, we come to the second group of stories and we noticed, among other things, that the woman with the haemorrhage and Jairus' daughter are twin stories, because Jairus comes and the Lord begins to go with him and then the woman comes, but the woman has to be dealt with first and then finally, Jairus's daughter is raised.

Common elements

Now if those are the basic contents, let me just point out that those stories have a lot of detail in common. I'll just point out some of things that are in common and it will be for you to decide how many of them are significant.

A question of faith

Look at story one, 'I also am a man under authority and say to this one, "Go", and he goes'. Said Jesus, 'Not even in Israel have I have found such faith.' To show I'm not making it up, would anybody like to read the details of the storm at sea, at story five? And if anybody notices anything in this one that's similar to story one, just shout!

AUDIENCE:

One day he got into a boat with his disciples, and he said to them, 'Let us go across to the other side of the lake.' So they set out, and as they sailed he fell asleep. And a windstorm came down on the lake, and they were filling with water and were in danger. And they went and woke him, saying, 'Master, Master, we are perishing!' And he awoke and rebuked the wind and the raging waves, and they ceased, and there was a calm. He said to them, 'Where is your faith?' And they were afraid, and they marvelled, saying to one another, 'Who then is this, that he commands even winds and water, and they obey him?' (8:22–25)

DWG: Can anybody see any faint similarity between the wording of these two stories?

AUDIENCE: The authority he had over the wind and the waves.

DWG: Yes. The centurion commands and they obey, just as the wind and waves obey. 'I have not found such faith.' Wherein did this man's faith lie? And what does the Lord say to his disciples?

AUDIENCE: 'Where is your faith?'

DWG: Yes. Bit rough on the apostles, isn't it? Wouldn't you be panic stricken if you were in a little boat like that and the water was coming over the gunnels and the boat was going down? Do you think the rebuke was fair? The chap over here thinks it was.

AUDIENCE: The waves and the wind weren't the problem. It was their lack of faith.

DWG: Yes, but I say is it fair to blame them with lack of faith? What do you mean, 'lack of faith'? Faith in what?

AUDIENCE: They had previous experience of God and his power.

DWG: Yes. It's faith in who Christ is. That is pointing the lesson. The detail is not just irrelevant little circumstantial detail. In the stories, every word counts: this is inspired Scripture. There are folks who are tossed with the storms of life, so to speak, and in desperate fear. And some might say to them, 'Have faith'; but faith in what? How do you get the faith? Well the question of faith is, faith in who Christ is. It's not just a stiff upper lip—determined to face it and not to give in. It's faith in who Jesus is. And when we come to die, ladies and gentlemen, the Lord may well yet lead us to think, 'And who gave us life in the first place?' It's he who gave us life in the first place, and will he not control when that physical life is removed? That doesn't do away with our tears, and we're not blamed for our tears. Our Lord himself wept at Lazarus' grave. But ultimately, he is Jesus and if he who gave us the life allows it to be taken, that challenges our natural courage. We can weep, there's nothing wrong in weeping, but in the end it will come down to faith in who he is. Is he master of every wave, drop of water, germ, virus? That's important, isn't it?

So in these first stories we have faith for salvation in the initial sense—a man being saved from physical death (centurion's servant) and a man being raised from physical death (widow's son)—but also providing an illustration at the spiritual level: 'You were dead in trespasses and sins' and you're saved by faith. What does faith mean? Somebody says, 'I have great faith and if I do the best I can, I shall be in heaven.' Is that what faith is? The centurion shows that it is faith in who Jesus is. That was the point at issue, wasn't it? 'Lord, you don't need to come to my house. I'm not worthy anyway, but you don't even need to come, because I am a man under authority and because I stand under his Majesty, Caesar, when I say to a soldier, "Come", he comes. When I say to another soldier, "Go", he goes, and if I say to someone, "Do this", he does it, because I'm under authority. The authority of the emperor, and I can wield that authority. And I perceive, Jesus, you're like that. All you need to do is to speak your word.'

This is magnificent, isn't it? The whole creation came into being when God spoke, and when the blessed Lord speaks, the man is healed. It's faith in Jesus then. Not just, 'I've got great confidence in this, that or the other.' It's faith in Jesus and who Jesus is, and the power of his word. Sometimes, even in the most intimate matter of leading a person to Christ, it's a question of saying, 'Are you prepared to stake all on his word?'

The social outcasts

Let's come to this obvious one, the woman in Simon's house. And Simon says, 'He should have known what kind of woman touched him, for she is a sinner.' What did this woman do, according to the text?

AUDIENCE: Touched him.

DWG: Yes, what else did she do before she touched him?

AUDIENCE: Came behind.

DWG: And the woman with the haemorrhage also came behind. And Jesus said, 'Who touched me? I perceive someone touched me.' Now that, of course, is not just incidental

things that happen to look alike. In Simon's house, the woman came behind because they would be seated round a low table, reclining on couches and so our Lord would be reclining with his feet over the edge of the couch. And she came up behind and touched his feet, and wept over them, and dried them with her hair and anointed them.

This other woman came up behind too, but that was very deliberately coming behind. She didn't want to be seen. Notice some obvious contrasts. In Simon's house, he would have known what kind of woman it was who touched him—that she was a sinner. And in the other story, 'Who touched me? Oh, yes, I know.' Even with all the folks gathered, pressing round him, he knew this individual touch. Why? Because this was a special touch that made the contact, that brought the power streaming from him to her. And there lies the difference. The first was a question of immoral behaviours: she was an immoral woman. This woman wasn't immoral: that wasn't the difficulty. This was a physical difficulty but it carried ceremonial uncleanness.

This demoniac was in that sense anti-social, in a very big way. He lived in the tombs, highly anti-social, and was self-destructive—cutting himself and mutilating his own body. Terrible disorders. We have it amongst us still, of course. This second woman was not anti-social, but she had been cut off from the synagogue and from normal social contact because of her condition: they feared it defiled.

So there are differences as well as similarities. When it comes to expounding this, once more the details will be an important part of your sermon. You won't have to make up a sermon if you preach these stories—not if you follow all the details Luke gives. The difficulty, at least I know it from my own experience, is that sometimes we start off with a story, say the woman in Simon's house, and instead of expounding all the details that Luke gives, we start bringing in a lot of, 'This is by faith, you know, and this is the gift of God.' Well that is true, but what we're doing is mixing up the stories a bit. It's better to keep to the detail of each story.

AUDIENCE: In Jewish culture, the woman with the haemorrhage was ceremonially unclean. From that point of view, she couldn't have touched other Jews.

DWG: No, because it would have made them unclean.

AUDIENCE: So for her to touch Jesus demonstrated some assurance on her part that he would not react to that.

DWG: Yes, that's right. But of course she feared coming up behind a great rabbi and in front of all the crowd. If that had been an ordinary rabbi, he might well have cursed her when he found out why she did it. Why do you think he made her confess then? Was that a little bit unkind of the Lord to make that poor lady come out in front of everybody, publicly, and confess why she'd touched him? He didn't make the immoral woman confess all her sins in front of the dinner party, did he? Why did he make her confess?

AUDIENCE: One consequence of it was that he was establishing publicly that she was now clean.

DWG: That's right, yes. He was declaring her clean: that's a very good point. The priests would necessarily have said that she was unclean and banned her. He was now pronouncing her clean in front of everybody, so that was a very gracious thing for him to do.

AUDIENCE: Another possibility was that in trying to touch Jesus, she had touched others on the way, bumped into them and made them also unclean; and he was showing that, just as she had to come to Jesus for cleansing, the way that they would have to be cleansed from their spiritual uncleanness was to come to the same person.

DWG: Yes, surely. And do you think it in any way involves her relationship with Christ? What's the difference between coming up behind Jesus secretly and touching the hem of his garment, and being made to come and face him?

AUDIENCE: Like in Romans 10:10?

DWG: Well yes, if you like. But in Israel they also had this notion that holy men could produce cures. That was quite widespread in the time of Jesus, that a holy man could produce cures and all you needed was to touch a bit of his garment. And if the old boy died, you got a relic, and you touched that and you would be healed—which is not faith but superstition. But the fact is that when she came, she came in faith. She did believe, but her faith was not yet very advanced. 'If I just touch the hem of his garment,' she said, 'I shall be healed.' There's a hymn to that effect, 'She only touched the hem of his garment'⁴ as though that's a jolly good way to do it.

A personal relationship

But she didn't go home only having touched the hem of his garment. It was important that our Lord indicated that this is not a matter of superstition. Jesus isn't an impersonal power that you can turn the tap on. This must be a personal relationship. He made her come to him and face him. And from him personally, she heard the great word of assurance, 'Your faith has saved you, go in peace.' It's not an impersonal thing; not a question of relics or charms or such things. Religion so easily goes to that, but it mustn't be that. It's got to be a personal relationship with the Lord.

Though her faith was still imperfect, when she came and touched his garment, immediately she was healed. But he wouldn't let her away with just that and he wasn't being unkind. Now she'd faced the Lord himself over it and of course he knew her secrets and he knew all her distress. He'd known all about it all the way along. She had to hide it from everybody else. She needn't hide it from him, and he loved her just the same anyway, and wanted to establish a personal relationship with her.

In the Acts of the Apostles you'll read of certain Jewish exorcists at Ephesus, who went around casting out demons and things. One of them took it into his head to exorcize demons saying, 'I command you in the name of Jesus that Paul preaches, you come out' (Acts 19:13–16, own trans.). The man in whom the demon was, jumped on him! People think you can use the name of Jesus as a kind of a charm. No, it's a personal relationship with the Lord. That's lovely in the end, isn't it?

⁴ George F. Root (1820-95).

Faith—the key element

There are still other things we could notice in these stories, such as the raising of Jairus' daughter and how it illustrates what we read in 1 Corinthians 15:51, 'Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed'. And many other points besides. But I think we would do well to note again the repeated references to faith—'Your faith has saved you.' The centurion had it—so he was confident that the Lord didn't even need to come to his house. The woman with the haemorrhage had it—'if I only touch the hem of his garment, I shall be healed'. And the parable of the sower points to the enemy's tactics. The devil comes and takes away the good seed, 'so that they should not believe and be saved,' says Luke. Faith then, only believe. That is a message in itself: salvation is by faith.

Luke's Gospel is a very careful piece of writing—inspired, of course. Like a snowflake, it is an absolute marvel of pattern. The salvation of God is no accidental thing. Here is theology—the doctrine of salvation—but put across in stories of actual incidents. That's the marvel of it.

Galatians—How to Argue (1)

Apostolic Authority and Church History

What I had thought to do, by way of epistles, is to take first the Epistle to the Galatians and then, the first Epistle of John. Both of them you will know very well, having read them and studied them many times. As we look now at the Epistle to the Galatians, it will not therefore simply be for its content, but as a lesson in how to argue.

Why argue?

Now some people think that that's the last thing a Christian should do. Christians should not argue. They should just be content to witness for the Lord and allow the Holy Spirit to convict the person concerned, or illuminate them, but you should not argue. I think Christians who talk like that are objecting to arguing because, in their mind, arguing is the same thing as wrangling, losing your temper, trying to win a debate, and they say, 'You don't get anybody led to the Lord by winning a debate.' Well certainly we shouldn't wrangle and we shouldn't lose our tempers, and we're not in it to see who's the best debater.

Having said all that, a vast amount of the Synoptic Gospels is given over to a record of our Lord's arguments. John Stott wrote a book years ago called *Christ the Controversialist*⁵. It is a study of the long arguments that Christ had with his contemporaries: page after page in the New Testament is given over to the arguments. They weren't discussions. They were, some of them, very pointed arguments which our Lord had with the Pharisees and Sadducees and scribes, and ordinary Jews. Moreover, many of the epistles are primarily arguments. Paul has to deal with false teaching and wrong teachers and the doctrines they were propagating: to refute them, he has to argue. If we would be faithful Christians, we will find it necessary sooner or later in our witness for the Lord to argue. Even those who say you shouldn't, if you listen to them carefully, you'll find them using words like 'for' and 'because' and you can't use words like that without the fact that you are arguing! You are giving reasons. 'I don't believe that.' 'Why don't you believe it?' 'Well, because,'—and you give your reasons. You're arguing, in other words. If somebody earnest said to you, 'I believe that so long as I have faith and I do my best, I shall be saved,' you normally wouldn't let them away with that, would you? You'd say, 'But no, that's not right because . . .'.

⁵ John R. W. Stott, 1970, IVP Books.

So you're arguing, and in that sense of arguing, we must follow the Lord and we must emulate his apostles at our level and know how to argue in a Christian way. It is not simply a matter of winning a debate of course. If you take Galatians, which is one long string of arguments, Paul spends much time arguing because of what is at stake. The Epistle to the Galatians can, I suppose, be summed up in its thrust by the famous words of 5:1: 'For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.' The issue at stake is freedom and the danger is that dear Christian people, who have been brought into freedom by Christ, could, without their realizing what is happening, be brought back into slavery. No truly Christian heart can stand by and see people who should be free and enjoying their freedom, being entangled again in a yoke of slavery. Something must be done. We're for people's freedom.

Arguing for Freedom

It's strange how folks will give up their freedom in the name of religion. Let me turn aside and cite an illustration. Our Lord was in a synagogue one day 'and there was a woman who had had a disabling spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not fully straighten herself' (Luke 13:11). She was bound and bent right over, poor dear soul. She came shuffling into the synagogue and our Lord healed her. The ruler of the synagogue objected, and cited the Bible to reinforce his objection, 'There are six days in the week to come and be healed, not on the Sabbath' (v. 14, own trans.). Our Lord of course rebuked him, but it is interesting, isn't it? The Sabbath day in Israel had two or three purposes behind it. One of them was that they should remember the Creator, that in six days he made heaven and earth and rested on the seventh. Another was, according to Deuteronomy, that they had been slaves in Egypt and God had broken the yoke of their bondage and brought them out of slavery into freedom. Describing that deliverance, the book of Leviticus has a delightful phrase, 'I have broken the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect' (26:13).

In Egypt they were literal slaves, but the term 'yoke' can become a metaphor for slavery, for bondage. You put a yoke on people's necks so they can carry heavy burdens and the burdens eventually bow them down, and the old vertebrae get bent. So that is the posture of a slave, to be bent down at his work, and so they were in Egypt, making their bricks, and God delivered them. He took the yoke off their neck and made them go upright, and the Sabbath was to remember that. And here comes a woman, bent over, and the man says, 'Oh, she mustn't be set free to go upright on the Sabbath. She must keep bent until tomorrow.' How perverse can you get! That's religion for you. Religion, as religion, is so often against freedom. It is a curious thing how Christians down the centuries have, from time to time, lost their freedoms. We don't want to stir up old disputes, but it is the fact that for centuries people weren't even allowed to read their Bibles. In the name of God and religion and Christ, they weren't allowed to read the Bible!

I've just these recent months got interested in Tyndale. I've bought a copy of his delightful translation. Tyndale was burnt at the stake in the name of God and the church and Christ and the Holy Spirit—burnt at the stake for translating the Bible so that people could read it. And John Bunyan was put in prison for daring to preach without permission from the magistrate. And now in Russia again, things are looking bad, as the Orthodox

Church is trying to get all western missionaries banned. Curious thing that religion so often goes to making slaves of people.

It was that kind of thing which provoked Paul to write Galatians. We could look for a moment at Acts 15. I'm not saying that the men mentioned in Acts 15 were the men that were spreading false teaching in the province of Galatia, but you'll get an idea of what they were saying and who they were.

But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.' And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders about this question. So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the brothers. When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them. But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said 'It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses.' (Acts 15:1-5)

So first of all, you notice where this false notion came from. This was not an attack from the pagan world outside. This was a false idea amongst believers within the Christian community itself. You say, 'What did they believe?' Well they presumably believed that Jesus was the Messiah. They were of course Jews and, before they became Christians, they were circumcised as the law of Moses laid down they should be. When they believed Jesus to be the Christ, it didn't occur to them at first to ask themselves, 'Now what relation does our circumcision bear towards salvation?' Was that a necessary preliminary, or is faith in Christ by itself sufficient for salvation?

Salvation—on what basis?

Naturally enough, perhaps, they never did think it through until a whole lot of Gentiles began to get converted, and then the question arose. 'What is the relation of circumcision to salvation? Do you have to be circumcised in order to be saved or, being saved, do you have to be circumcised in order to keep saved, so to speak?' What is the relationship? And now they were forced to think it through. Notice there were, therefore, some in the Christian community themselves who'd have said to be saved the Gentiles must be circumcised and you notice that is what they are implying by the verdict that Peter gave, when he got the chance to speak.

And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, 'Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. Now, therefore, why are you putting God

to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? (Acts 15:7–10)

Good old Peter, standing up for the true liberty of the gospel and protesting vigorously, in Christian spirit of course, but protesting vigorously about this false teaching. Either intentionally, or unintentionally I suspect, it would have had the effect of reducing their freedom, putting a yoke upon their necks. And Peter regards it so seriously that he charges them with tempting God if they do it. They're very strong words, but that is his charge. He was faced with people that would say that circumcision is necessary for salvation, for receiving salvation; or it is necessary thereafter in order, so to speak, to keep saved and be accepted by the Christian community as being genuinely saved. 'To insist on that,' says Peter, 'is putting a yoke on the believers' necks, making them slaves once more and, for God's side, it is tempting God.' Why does he use such vigorous language? Because he has just explained that God himself authenticated the faith of the Gentiles by giving them the Holy Spirit. There can be no greater authentication of salvation than God giving these Gentiles the Holy Spirit, like he gave to the others on the day of Pentecost. 'If God has accepted them, if their hearts have been purified by faith and purified enough by faith that God himself can give them the Holy Spirit, you're telling them that they're not purified enough and now they must be circumcised before they can be accepted as believers. That is to tempt God himself.' That would be serious, wouldn't it?

So here is Peter reasoning—if you don't like the word 'arguing'—among the believers as to what the basic gospel of Christ is. This is not some little denominational dispute. This is about the very basis of the gospel. Peter summarizes what he has to say like this:

But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, just as they will. (15:11)

The question at stake is how and on what conditions they would be saved. Paul is stressing that it is by the grace of the Lord Jesus—not by circumcision, not by works—but by the grace of the Lord Jesus that we shall be saved, let alone them. What does he mean? Says Peter, 'We Jewish Christians believe that we are saved simply by the grace of Christ. Our circumcision didn't help or contribute anything whatever to salvation. That is our belief that we are saved simply by the grace of Christ, as well as they.'

So Jews and Greeks are saved on the same terms. It's not that the Gentiles are saved but not quite as saved as Peter was, because Peter was circumcised. No, we're all in the same boat. We're saved on the same conditions: that is the point of Peter's remark. So in Galatians, this is the kind of difficulty that Paul's converts were now suffering. Having believed on the Lord Jesus, now they were being told by men like these Pharisees who believed, that either to be saved or to remain saved, or to be fully accepted, they must be circumcised. And Paul reads it as a very denial of the gospel and he now sets out to oppose it, and therefore he argues so that his fellow believers may be delivered from this danger of renewed bondage. He says,

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. (Gal 5:1)

We need to get that in our hearts. It will affect our motives in arguing and our persistence. We're not just having wordy debates. What we're at is the delightful freedom of the people of God and we won't stand by and see it infringed. Similarly Paul says,

But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in—who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery—to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you. (2:3–5)

Why not? Here were people and they would try and put enormous pressure on Paul and others that Titus, who was a Greek, should be circumcised, and he said, 'I wouldn't stand for it. I wouldn't give way, not for moment.' Why all the fuss? Well he tells us: 'That the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.' If Paul had given way on that occasion and said, 'Yes, well Titus has faith in Christ, but to be saved he must be circumcised', or admitted that circumcision does contribute something to salvation, then you and I sitting here this morning would be uncertain of what the gospel was. So Paul wouldn't compromise, because he's concerned with the gospel being preserved without being fudged, right down to the Galatians and all down the generations to us. Good old Paul. He's concerned for our freedom, so he was prepared on that occasion to dig his heels in and stand for—notice what he calls it, not a party line, not a secondary thing of indifference but—*the truth of the gospel*.

Learning how to argue

You know the epistle, as I say, and you know its contents. What I want to do is to look through it and see if we can notice the different kinds of arguments that Paul uses and then the order in which he uses them. Why so? Well we can learn from Paul, whom God used so much. We can learn how to argue, not in any bad sense, but how to deliver people from bondage, or to maintain their freedom. What kinds of arguments would you use and what order would you use them in, in order to effect this purpose?

We shall see there are different kinds of argument. There's the argument from apostolic authority, which he uses at the early verses. Then,

1:11–2:21: An argument from church history—that is, the early history of the church.

3:1–7: An argument from experience, the experience of his converts.

3:8–29: An argument from explicit statements of Old Testament Scripture—about seven different quotations, one after the other, actual verses or statements of Scripture.

4:1–7: An argument from analogy, the analogy of a child and the way a child has to be educated while it's a child, and then the difference that comes in its treatment when it grows up and becomes an adult.

4:8–20: Another argument from experience.

- 4:21–5:1: A very interesting argument from Old Testament prototype.
- 5:2–12: A very strong argument by calling attention to the implications of the false doctrine. That is to say, not only what it taught, but the implications it would carry if it were true.
- 5:13–6:10: An argument from the fact that the gospel does make provision for holy living, and what that provision is and what it involves.

The point of that last argument is this: when Paul preached that we're justified by faith and not by circumcision or works of the law, the standard argument that would come back at him was, 'But, Paul, that cannot be right, for if you could be justified by faith, accepted by God and know it and be sure of it, that would mean that you could live a self-indulgent, sinful life and it wouldn't matter.' And Paul says, 'That is nonsense. The doctrine of justification by faith does not mean that a believer is free to live a sinful life. God has a provision by which a believer shall live a holy life and that is that he is led by the Spirit—the famous words of 5:16, 'Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.' But because this is part of an argument, 5:18 rounds the argument up by saying, 'But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.' You see he's having an argument. He's saying, 'We're not saved by circumcision or by the keeping of the law.'

'Does that lead to sinful living?'

'No it doesn't.'

'Why doesn't it?'

'Because God makes provision by his Holy Spirit, the living Spirit of the living God, leading us and guiding us and opposing the flesh.'

That's how God gets us to live a holy life. But notice, Paul says, 'If that is God's way of doing it, by the Spirit, then you are not under law.' They are two different ways of producing holiness and the fact you are under the Spirit shows that you are not under law. Actually, law cannot sanctify anybody, law cannot justify anybody, but the principle of law cannot truly sanctify anybody either. It is the Holy Spirit's power that sanctifies us. That too then is an argument.

And finally, 6:11–16: An argument which rests on an exposure of the true motives of the false teachers. Paul is pointing out that, 'These false teachers who keep on telling you that you must be circumcised, actually they don't keep the law either, and they're doing this that they might glory in your flesh.' Now that is to attack the motives of the false teacher. It would be a wise thing for us to notice at what stage Paul uses that particular argument. It is the very last argument he uses. He first establishes, by all kinds of arguments, what the true doctrine of the gospel is, and that the other thing is false. He points out that the false teachers themselves are grossly inconsistent in the way they live. 'They would have you be circumcised and keep the law but they don't even keep the law themselves.' It doesn't produce true holiness, in other words.

So that, I thought, is the way we could look at this epistle. It is stern stuff, but it's in a wonderful cause. If we love our brothers and sisters in Christ, we shall want to help to keep them free from any yokes of bondage. If we love our unconverted friends, who are religiously inclined and have their faith in religion rather than in Christ, it is good to have

some knowledge of how we can help them, how we can reason with them, and how we can do it effectively and lovingly. That will be very important. It is a service to them and to the Lord, therefore, to learn how to argue.

Now I'm not saying that when you get folks that you think have not enjoyed true freedom and you want to lead them into it, or stop them from giving it up, that you have to go through all these arguments in this order. Circumstances and the different people you meet will determine how you go about it. But this letter shows the way an active apostle and working missionary approached the problem. Not being able to visit, he wrote a letter and it comes out of his burning heart of love to see their liberty maintained. So let's look through what he says. Perhaps we can spend some time tomorrow on it, but just if I could point out some of these arguments and how they work.

Apostolic authority and its source

Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—and all the brothers who are with me, To the churches of Galatia: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen. (Gal 1:1–5)

Now Galatians is a letter, and in the ancient world there was a style of letter writing, just as there is today. Well, there used to be in my boyhood. I don't know what they do now, particularly when people have internets and describe themselves as 'Williamson.co.uk!' When I was a boy, you began a letter generally with 'Dear'. There were occasions when you would say, 'My dear', but you had to choose those occasions with great care! Sometimes you wrote, 'Dear Sir'. That was very formal, and if you said, 'Dear Sir' at the beginning, you ended with 'Yours faithfully'. You didn't write like that to a friend, and if you were more familiar with somebody, you didn't say, 'Dear Mr Smith', you said, 'Dear Smith'. That meant you were on very friendly terms, but he wasn't one of the family; and then you might end with, 'Yours sincerely'. You had your formal way of starting letters and ending them, and you signed the letter at the end.

Greeks and Romans had their way of writing letters in their standard form. You didn't begin, 'Dear so and so', and end the letter with, 'Yours truly in Christ', or something. Instead of signing it at the end, you put your name at the beginning and then the names of those you are addressing it to. How you describe yourself would be determined by the circumstances. So here you've got 'Paul, an apostle' and then 'to the churches of Galatia'. Then you normally added a greeting and, if you knew the folks, you could have some flowery phrase. Notice how Paul in writing is adopting the ordinary form, but he makes even that serve the purpose that he's writing for—no wasted time on mere formalities. 'Paul, an apostle', and then he adds, 'not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead'.

This is Paul not only announcing who he is, but claiming his apostolic authority, right from the word go. Why? Because this is going to be enormously important, as we shall see

later, when he comes to establishing the doctrine of the gospel that he preached. What authority did he have to preach it? He says here he's an apostle and then adds, 'not from men nor through man'.

I remember years and years ago, in the 1960s, before some of you were born, I was new in Ireland when some folks rang me up. They were some Church of Ireland folks and they had a friend in their church who, they explained to me, was now going to join the Roman Catholic Church and become a monk. They had been talking to him, but they asked if I would be willing to talk to him. I said, 'If you think I could be any help, but please you must first ask the man whether he wants to come and talk to me. You shouldn't force him to come.' Well eventually he came of his own will apparently. He was a very nice, sincere chap indeed. He told me, 'I'm Church of Ireland but I feel that God would have me join the Church of Rome and become a monk.' What did I think of that? Well that put me on the spot. I said, 'Well I find it difficult, my dear friend, because your church curses me. So I find it very difficult if you say you're going to join it.' This was before Vatican Council II, I might remind you. He said, 'What do you mean, it curses you?' Well I said, 'I'm one of those people who believe that you can be saved and know it simply through faith in Christ. What the Council of Trent calls *Fiducia*, 'confidence in Christ', and if anybody says he's saved simply by confidence in Christ, "let him be anathema". I'm sorry, from your point of view, but I have to be honest. I do believe I'm saved through Christ and I know it.'

'Oh,' he said, 'you shouldn't know it. It all depends on your works. You can't know you're saved until the final judgment.'

I read him from Romans 4:

Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes on him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness. (vv. 4-5)

'Oh,' he said, 'I don't know what that means. I didn't know that was in the Bible. But I don't know what it means at all. That's the trouble with you Protestants: you think you can interpret the Bible by yourself. You can't interpret the Bible by yourself. It's the church that gave us the Bible and we have to let the church tell us what it means. You should take that verse to a priest and let the priest tell you what it means.'

'That's very curious. Suppose I had been concerned about my spiritual state and I had taken the trouble to go to see Paul when he was in Arabia in the desert, and I asked him how I could be saved and how I could be justified. And suppose Paul had said to me by word of mouth what he writes here: "To the one who does not work but believes on him who justifies the ungodly". Could I have believed it on the spot, just listening to Paul, or would I have to take it to the church at Jerusalem to get their approval as to whether it was right or not?'

'You'd have to take it to Jerusalem. You'd have to take it to the church, because it's the church that appointed him as an apostle, and the church gives us the Bible. It's the church that gives us the Epistle to the Romans.'

'Well, Paul actually says here, "Paul, an apostle, not from men". The church didn't appoint him as an apostle.'

‘Yes, well, Paul was an apostle, not from men, but through men. His apostleship came from God, but it was given to him through the church. It came through men.’

‘Well actually it says here, “Not from men nor through man”.’

They may be small words, but they are colossally important. That Paul got his apostleship straight from the risen Lord means that you may take what he says straight. That is very important. You could have come to Paul in the Arabian Desert when he was there and asked, ‘How can I be saved, Paul?’ and he’d tell you it by word what he wrote in his epistles. You could hear what he said, understand what he said, believe it and be saved. You didn’t have to go up to the church at Jerusalem to see whether Paul was talking the truth or not.

That’s why Paul gives us this long argument from church history in Galatians. He tells us he went up to Jerusalem at one time and, when he got there, they who seemed to be influential (‘pillars’ KJV), ‘they added nothing to him.’ That became a big point and it remains a very big point, and in a sense our freedom depends on it. The Epistle to the Romans, do we get it from God, through Paul, or is it the church that gives it to us? Did the church appoint Paul an apostle, or was Paul appointed direct by the Lord? In actual practical terms that means a great deal. It means if he’s an apostle straight from God, you can come to what he writes and what he says and hear it, believe it, receive it, and be saved.

That immediate access is one of the great foundations of our freedom and that remains still true. As you know I work for Russia. I don’t visit it very often, but I write a lot of things for Russia. A great Orthodox Church there holds the view of unreformed churches that ordinary folk shouldn’t read the Bible. Why? The church gives us the Bible and therefore it’s no use your trying to read the Bible or understand what it means; you must let the church tell you what it means. That’s a very big issue at stake, and this is why Paul is emphasizing his apostolic authority and the source of it—not to exalt himself, being proud. He’s standing for our liberty, our freedom to come direct to God through him. Through him and his preaching and his Gospel and his written ministry—direct, each man and woman—to God. Of course we don’t despise the evangelist and the teacher and the pastor—that would be stupid. We don’t neglect what great men and women of God have thought about Scripture all down the ages. But ultimately, our freedom depends on being able to come to an apostle, be it Paul or whichever one, direct. You don’t have to come through the church. That is very important.

Appointed by God and the risen Christ

Secondly, Paul says, ‘but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead’. Notice that Paul is an apostle appointed by the God who raised Christ from the dead. The authentication of Christ’s person and his work and his ministry rely upon his resurrection. It is the God who raised Christ from the dead who appointed Paul the Apostle. Then he says, ‘and all the brothers who are with me, To the churches of Galatia: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ’. But now he expands it to present the gospel—‘who gave himself for our sins to deliver us . . .’. Listen to that. That’s the bell striking a theme that’s going to run through the epistle—freedom. He gave himself

for us to deliver us, rescue us, redeem us, out of this present age with all its evil, 'according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen.' Freedom from the guilt of sin—not freedom that allows us to live as we like—but freedom from this evil age with all its evil behaviour. That is true freedom.

The centrality of the gospel

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. For am I now seeking the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ. (1:6–10)

The argument from apostolic authority has a very specific focus. Look how many times he mentions it is about the gospel. We need, therefore, very clearly to get into our heads, in all the many discussions and controversies that arise in Christendom and the Christian community, the thing to keep our eyes on is the gospel. That is fundamental and that is the thing which, if we're not careful, gets fudged. Church organization and all these other things are but secondary matters compared with this fundamental thing.

Let me illustrate what I mean. The church at Corinth was a brilliant church, full of brilliant spiritual gifts, but they were in very serious trouble, as is evident from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. If there was a right way of doing something and a wrong way of doing something, you could rely upon the Corinthians to do it the wrong way. So Paul has to write them a letter and point out what they are doing wrong and tell them how they should recover. What I have found very interesting in these last years is the way he brings them back, the way he tries to correct the faults in the church. He doesn't just write to them and say, 'You can't do that, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, because it breaks rule two hundred and forty-five, subsection D of canon law.' No, it's because it conflicts with the very basis of the gospel. That's why they mustn't do it.

For instance, they were dividing up into parties and some were calling themselves after Paul, some after Apollos, some after Cephas and that kind of strife within the church. 'You have to quit doing that,' says Paul, 'it conflicts with the basic doctrine of the cross of Christ.' And he then explains how it conflicts with the basis of the gospel, which is the cross of Christ. 'Haven't you begun to wake up to why God saved you by that extraordinary tactic which is the cross of Christ? The way you're behaving and your party spirit denies the very purpose that God had in mind when he designed the cross of Christ to be the way of our salvation.'

Moreover, a large number of them were puffed up with their supposed liberty. They were allowing such sexual immorality as shocked the very Greeks, and Greeks took some shocking. 'You can't go on like that,' says Paul, 'it conflicts with the very gospel. Do you

know Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us? That's basic gospel, so we are obliged to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread, like the Israelites had to. Passover had to be followed by the unleavened bread and you couldn't separate the two. So when Christ our Passover died for us, then it is obligatory on us to purge out the old leaven of sinful behaviour that we might be a new lump. Your behaviour is contradicting the gospel.' And so he goes on through his Epistle.

'Your behaviour when you come to church,' he says, 'is absolutely shocking. You come to eat the Lord's Supper, but it is in fact impossible to eat the Lord's Supper the way you're behaving.' Is the Lord's Supper some sort of small little matter? No, it goes to the very heart of the gospel. When the Lord took bread and took wine and said, "This is my body, given for you; my blood shed for you," there's nothing more fundamental to the gospel than that.' And the way they were behaving was going straight against it.

It's the gospel that goes in Christendom, ladies and gentlemen. You've observed that in history. In the end, it's the gospel that gets fudged and all the great revivals have been revivals about recovering the gospel. So you will understand the vigour of Paul's arguments here in Galatians—we need vigorous argument. It's the gospel we contend for and upon that depends people's freedom.

So now to 1:11–2:21. It's a long passage and very often the preachers take certain wonderful verses out of it:

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (2:20–21)

We quote it very often in its own right and simply say, 'Here is the secret of a truly Christian, devoted, holy life.' But actually it's part of a long argument that starts in 1:11 and goes onto the end of chapter 2, and you will see that by the comment in verse 21 that follows: 'I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.' Those lovely verses, 19–20: 'For through the law I died to the law' and 'It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me', are part of this big argument. And Paul makes the deduction, that being so, 'If this is the principle on which I live, I do not then make void the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose' (v. 21, own trans.). It's part of the big argument, so the big argument starts with early church history.

Arguing from church history

Now when we think of church history, we're very often thinking of the post-apostolic age and the church fathers and all that stuff. Important as that is, this is church history right from the very start and this is Paul telling us a bit of history. 'For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel.' Now here's a very important bit of history. It is enormously important that we know our church history and

the history of how Paul got converted, and what he did and where he went when he got converted, and the point of his history is to show us that his gospel is not man's gospel. He got it direct from the risen Lord.

For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it . . . But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone; nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. (1:12–13, 15–17)

Now some say he did go up to Jerusalem, and the historians argue about it. For the moment, let's take what Paul himself is telling us, as far as getting his gospel from other apostles or from the church at Jerusalem. 'No,' says he, 'I did not. I got it direct from the blessed Lord and I went off into Arabia.' I've already said why that was important.

Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him for fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother. (In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!) Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. And I was still unknown in person to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. They only were hearing it said, 'He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.' And they glorified God because of me. (1:18–24)

His insistence then is that his apostleship and the gospel that he preached is not from man, 'They glorified God because of me.'

'Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. And how did I go up? And why did I go up—because the Jerusalem church summoned me to go up? No. I went up on my own account. I went up by revelation, not by invitation, certainly not by command. I went up by revelation.' Because God had revealed it to him that he should go.

'I . . . set before them (though privately before those who seemed influential) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain' (v. 2). What does that mean? That he wasn't quite sure of the gospel he preached and, if it had been wrong, then he'd wasted all his labour? No, he doesn't mean that. He means that if, when he got to Jerusalem the apostles who were before him and the elders didn't agree with his gospel, then the repercussion on his work throughout the areas where he had preached would be very serious indeed, and what he had built up could have been destroyed.

You see that kind of thing in what we read from Acts 15. The church in Antioch had been founded not by apostles, but by Greek-speaking Christians largely, or Hellenistic Jews. That had been set up and folks were converted, and they were going on very nicely thank you, when there came down these fellows from Judea and made out they came from the apostles, and they taught the brethren that, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the

custom of Moses, you cannot be saved' (Acts 15:1). And, because they came down from Judea, the local believers were saying, 'Well, is this right then? Perhaps Paul and company have not taught us the gospel as they should.'

It was arranged that Paul should go up to Jerusalem, not to find out what the gospel was, but to get a statement from the apostles at Jerusalem that they in fact believed the same gospel that Paul did. So he went up to Jerusalem and set before them the gospel that he preached; and they agreed absolutely and entirely with Paul and they then issued letters that went like this: 'We understand that certain men have come down to you, purporting to come from us. They had no authority from us whatsoever. We stand with Paul and Barnabas. We agree with them totally.' That was the purpose of the letter given from the Council at Jerusalem, so he didn't go up because he was summoned.

Secondly, there was Titus, who was a Greek. 'He was with me. He was not compelled to be circumcised. We wouldn't submit him to circumcision' (Gal 2:3, own trans.). Now that's interesting because, on another occasion, Paul did circumcise his other colleague, Timothy (see Acts 16:3). Why did Paul circumcise Timothy and refuse to have Titus circumcised? The answer is this: Paul was not agreeing that circumcision was necessary for salvation. If you said circumcision was necessary for salvation, Paul would chase you round the earth! But with Timothy's case, there was a practical reason. Timothy's mother was a Jewess, his father was a Greek. He hadn't been circumcised, but his mother being a Jewess made him a Jew, and there were many Christian Jews who said, 'We don't get circumcised to be saved. We're very clear about that. But we have a conscience that because the Old Testament tells Jews that they ought to be circumcised, we feel that is God's will for Jews, so we ought to be circumcised. We're as clear as you are, Paul, that it's not for salvation, but we think that Christian Jews ought still to keep those commandments from the Old Testament. We've a conscience about it and if you're going to teach Jewish Christians that they don't need to keep the Bible, that's very strange to us.' So Paul said, 'Okay, we're clear enough. It's not for salvation, but if you feel as a Jew that you ought to keep this thing, that's okay. Let Timothy be circumcised, because he is a Jew.' Titus wasn't a Jew. Paul wouldn't give in on that case. He was a Greek. There was no reason on earth why he should be circumcised. The Old Testament didn't say that Gentiles had to be circumcised.

You get a similar thing today. There are some believers, in the west of Scotland you'll meet them, who feel that Christians are under obligation to keep Sunday as a complete Sabbath. There are other Christians, for example in Spain, who don't think you ought to keep Sunday as a Sabbath: they've no conscience about it at all. What shall we say: is it necessary to keep the Sabbath to be saved? Well no, indeed not, and if somebody told you that you can't be saved if you don't keep the Sabbath, like our Seventh-day Adventist friends tell you, then they're saying something very serious indeed. You don't have to keep the works of the law, and Sabbath is one of them, to be saved. But now, if you are saved, should you as a matter of conscience, because you feel that it's the Lord's will for you, keep the Sabbath? And some dear Christians say, 'Yes, of course you should,' and they have a very big conscience about it.

So in the west of Scotland, there are many such. What would you do if you went to the west of Scotland to preach the gospel? Well one thing you shouldn't do is drive your car into

the village on a Sunday! If you do that, you might as well go and rob the bank and then stand up and preach the gospel, because to them you are breaking a command that's binding on Christians. Not for salvation, but a thing that Christians ought to do. So you would say, 'Right, I'll walk then, inconvenient though that is for my corns and my rheumatism. I'll walk so I cannot offend their conscience and I can get the gospel to them.' They're very keen, some of them, on keeping the Sabbath, but some of them are not personally born again. They don't know what it means. So Paul was like that. Yes, he would circumcise Timothy, not for Timothy's salvation, but for the Jewish Christians. But in the case of Titus, no, not on your life. He quotes this incident to show that he would not give way to pressure, so that the gospel should be un-fluffed, uncompromised and come right down to us.

We deserve to praise God for Paul and his daring to stand. If he hadn't stood firm, we would have been left uncertain about us Gentiles. Paul, after all, had to admit that Timothy must be circumcised, so do we have to keep the law to be saved? That is very important. Then he comes to his visit to Jerusalem, you notice, and he says, 'Those who were reputed to be something, when they heard how I preached the gospel, they added nothing to me. The only addition that they mentioned was that we should remember the poor and that I was doing already. There was no division amongst the leaders of the church in those early days. They gave me the right hand of fellowship' (vv. 6–10, own trans.). It's exceedingly important then, and you see again how that we would have been quite justified to go to Paul in Arabia, listen to what he said as he preached the gospel, believed and been saved. We would not have had to submit his preaching to the church to get their approval, and certainly not their interpretation.

Practising what we preach

Next he comes to that unfortunate incident when Peter, himself a great champion of Christian doctrine, on one occasion fluffed the gospel and got himself into a bit of bother.

But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, 'If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?' (2:11–14)

What happened was, there was this nice conference of Christians, this convention for the deepening of spiritual life or something, and of course there were the interludes and the mealtime periods, and Peter had been eating happily with the Gentile Christians. When these fellows came down from James one day, Peter got up from the table and he said he didn't feel well, he had a stomach ache or something, I don't know what it was, and that he was going to his room. But Paul stood in the doorway and said, 'No, you don't, Cephas. What you are doing now, you're doing out of fear of these fellows from Judea, from James;

and you are now refusing to eat with the Gentiles, because they're not circumcised. By your behaviour, what you are in effect saying is that these Gentiles are not as equally saved as you are. That faith in Christ has not purified them enough for you to accept them as fellow believers and to eat with them. They're not circumcised and until they get circumcised, they wouldn't be pure enough for you to sit down and have table fellowship with them. Peter, you're acting the old hypocrite.'

Notice the words he uses. They're strong words. '[They] acted hypocritically . . . that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy' (v. 13). That's a strong word to use. But you see there are two forms of hypocrisy. The one is to pretend that you are what you're not, to believe what you don't in fact believe. The other form of hypocrisy is to pretend that you are not what you are. That you don't believe what you do believe. 'And, Peter, you do believe, don't you, that these Gentile Christians, although they haven't been circumcised, you do believe that their hearts have been purified by God through faith and God has given them the Holy Spirit, and they're as pure as you are. That's what you believe, but by your behaviour now, you're pretending not to believe that. And then you're pretending to believe something that you don't believe. You're pretending that circumcision is necessary for purification, is necessary for salvation, and you don't believe that, Peter. You are guilty of hypocrisy, and hypocrisy about the basic doctrines of the gospel.'

That is serious, and you see how serious it was, because Barnabas—a lovely, gracious, helpful brother who didn't suspect anybody's motives—was carried away by Peter's hypocrisy. And if a Barnabas can be carried away by inconsistent behaviour on the part of Peter like that, that's serious, isn't it? And that speaks to my heart. We must be as gracious as Barnabas, but when it comes to the gospel, we must not by our behaviour give the impression that we don't believe what we do believe and we mustn't give the impression that we do believe what we don't believe. We must, as Paul puts it now, ensure that our conduct is 'in step with the truth of the gospel' (v. 14).

It's not merely what they taught when they were preaching. This is how they behaved and that bit of behaviour on Peter's part was not consistent with the gospel he believed, and therefore it beclouded it, so much so that Barnabas was misled by him. 'We must behave,' says Paul, 'in a way that is in step with the truth of the gospel.' That we must never compromise. That is a very important principle and Paul points out to Peter, and to the rest of us, how vastly important this matter is.

We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet we know that a person is not justified by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified. But if, in our endeavour to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! (2:15–17)

What does he mean? Well presumably this, 'Peter, you have admitted that you are justified by faith and not by the works of the law. You've admitted that circumcision cannot save you: you must be justified solely by faith. Are you now turning round and saying that though you have put your faith in Christ, Christ isn't enough; and faith in Christ has left you still an impure sinner, who cannot be accepted by Christ in the sight of God, until you've

been circumcised? Is that what you're saying—that faith in Christ is not enough and you need this extra ceremony to purify you?' That would be serious, wouldn't it? That would be saying the gospel by itself is not enough. Then in verse 18, Paul adds, 'For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor.' In other words, if you're now going to say circumcision is necessary, you are admitting that all the while your gospel has been a transgression of the law. What does that do to the Christian gospel? He now explains what the true position is,

For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. (v. 19)

In other words, God's holy law with all its demands laid its penalty on me and I died to it that I might live to Christ. And the secret of Christian living now, and the secret of true holiness, is that I have been crucified with Christ. Let's notice what that means. In God's sight and before the law, I admitted that I was bankrupt. Having done the best I could to keep God's law, I failed: and the law sentenced me to its penalty, which is to be executed. I admitted it. Despite all my law keeping, circumcision, and all the ceremonies of Judaism, I deserved still the penalty of the law, which was to die. And I have died, because when I accepted Christ as Saviour, I've been joined to him and in God's sight, when Christ died, I died. And now I'm risen with Christ.

It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (v. 20)

'That's my secret,' says Paul. 'I do not nullify the grace of God. I believe I'm saved by grace. I could be saved no other way. I could not be saved by keeping the law, by being circumcised. Nothing that I could do along that line even so much as contributed anything to my salvation. My salvation was all of grace. If you are saying now, Peter, that we must add circumcision otherwise we're not properly saved, then you're cancelling out the grace of Christ, aren't you?'

'If circumcision could have saved us, or the law could have saved us, then Christ died for nothing. We didn't need to be saved. We didn't need him to die for us to be saved, Peter. But if Christ had to die so that we could be saved that shows how bankrupt we were. The law and circumcision, and all the ceremonies combined, have left us absolutely bankrupt, condemned before God's law, fit only to be executed, and if we're saved now as we are, it's solely by the grace of Christ. Peter, you must not fluff the gospel by your behaviour. You must always, by your behaviour in these things, leave it crystal clear in the eyes of people, how and on what conditions we are saved.'

Those are the first two big arguments in the Epistle to the Galatians:

- (1) Apostolic authority;
- (2) Church history.

There are a whole host of others. Perhaps in our first session tomorrow, we ought to look at them. But they put—perhaps 'ammunition' is not the right word—they put the sword of the Spirit into our hands. It is to be used vigorously, but with the love of Christ. It's people's salvation we're concerned about and their freedom. Not in party spirit, not in

denominational wrangle, but for the truth of the gospel upon which people's salvation and their freedom depends.

Galatians—How to Argue (2)

From Experience and From Scripture

We saw yesterday that Galatians is one of the epistles in the New Testament that talks about our Christian freedom. It's an interesting little exercise to take a concordance and to look at the occurrences, both of the noun *freedom*, the adjective *free* and the verb *to liberate*, to set free, and to see how many times they occur in the various epistles. You will find that Galatians, though it is a very short epistle, rivals 1 Corinthians for the epistle that talks most about the matter of our freedom in Christ. Of course, you will remember the words of the Lord Jesus himself:

If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free . . . The slave does not remain in the house for ever; the son remains for ever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. (John 8:31–32, 35–36)

They are magnificent words on the part of our Lord. The house is, of course, his Father's house. It is not just the whole, vast universe, but all that lies beyond it. He is the Son of the house. He is the Son of the owner of the universe. God doesn't wish to fill his house with slaves and Christ has come to set us free, to give us the freedom of the universe.

Paul likewise is the great champion of freedom in the New Testament, and in this Epistle to the Galatians we hear that stirring cry, 'For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery' (5:1). We have nothing to be ashamed of in the gospel. It sets people free. And we noticed yesterday that all this is set against the background, not particularly of atheism and the world, but against the background of religion. One of the faults about mere religion is that, instead of setting people free, in the end it brings them into bondage. So we set about looking at the Epistle to the Galatians primarily from a particular point of view. As junior workers in the Lord's harvest field, we are reading the epistle to get ideas from Paul as to how to argue.

We noticed that some people think arguing is a very bad thing. You should just witness and leave it to the Lord—that's ok, so long as you witness like the Lord witnessed. He argued. Most of his conversations are arguments. When the Sadducees came and said there was no resurrection, our Lord answered, 'But gentlemen, what about the Scripture that says thus and thus, and therefore this, and therefore that?' He was arguing, or disputing if you like, or discussing, from Scripture. If we would be capable and effective at this level of delivering folks who are not yet believers from bondage to Satan, and bondage to false religion, and if we would protect our fellow believers from being drawn back into ideas

which, if they accept, will drag them back into bondage, then we shall need to learn from Paul. In this letter he shows us how to argue—the kind of arguments that should be applied, in what proportion and in what order.

Apostolic authority

We noticed that Paul begins Galatians using the greeting for a statement of his authority as apostle. He affirms that he was not appointed *by* the church. He was appointed direct by God and by Christ. Moreover, he was not appointed by God *through* the church. He was an apostle, 'neither from men, nor through man'. He was appointed directly from the Lord.

No other gospel

Secondly, he points out that there is no other gospel than the gospel he preaches. That's very important, because some people could have said, 'Yes, Paul, you have one version of the Christian gospel, but of course there are others. We like to think of it this way, you think it another way.' But when it comes to the gospel by which men are saved, there are not two or three versions. There is only one gospel and Paul preached it. 'If anyone preaches any other gospel,' says Paul, 'let him be accursed' (1:8, own trans.). It is the fact that some people tried to suggest that Paul was preaching a gospel which the apostles at Jerusalem wouldn't have agreed with. Acts 15 records how Paul and Barnabas and the church of Antioch scotched that rumour. When Paul and Barnabas went up to Jerusalem, they secured a letter from the apostles and elders in Jerusalem to the effect that they agreed totally with Paul; and those chaps that had come down from Jerusalem and made out that Peter and James and the others disagreed with Paul were quite false. 'They had no authority from us,' says James. 'We agree absolutely with Paul on the gospel.' That is exceedingly important.

Defining the whole question of justification by faith, a few years ago we had the very inadequate ARCIC 2 Report⁶ on the discussions between the Anglican theologians and the Roman Catholic theologians on the question of salvation and justification. The Presbyterians of America came up with their report, which was a very thoroughgoing theological analysis of the issue, and came to the conclusion that the doctrine of justification by faith as expounded by Luther and others to the present, was theologically different from and irreconcilable with Rome's doctrine. Nonetheless, said that report, you can say they're both valid. We live in an age, ladies and gentlemen, where people are inclined to fluff the gospel. Because of all the terrible persecutions and fighting and sometimes wars, where people have tried to further or defend the Christian gospel by force of arms, there has now been a reaction the other way round. Let's forget all the doctrine and be nice. But that is not Paul's attitude. 'There is only one gospel and if anybody preaches a different gospel from what I preach,' says Paul, 'let him be accursed'. Those are some of the most solemn words in the New Testament. That isn't religious spite and vendetta: he's standing for people's freedom.

⁶ Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission.

The source of the gospel

Next Paul says that when he got converted, he didn't get his gospel from men, but he went off into Arabia. We saw yesterday the practical implication of that. If we had been living in the time of Paul, let me say it again, concerned how we might be right with God, and we had gone to Paul in Arabia and asked him to tell us how a person can get right with God, and if Paul had told us by word of mouth what he writes in his letters, could we have believed it there and then? Could we have accepted it and been saved and justified and at peace with God, and be absolutely certain of it? Or would we have to say, 'We hear what you say, Paul, but we couldn't possibly understand that ourselves. We must take all this to the apostles at Jerusalem to see whether they agree with you and we must let them interpret it for us'?

That's a very big point. Are we free as individuals to come straight to Paul, so to speak, or do we have to come through the church? The same question applies to the Bible as a whole—whether it comes to us from God through the apostles and other inspired writers, or whether it is that the church gave us the Bible. That is a very live issue still today. If you are working in Russia, as some of us do, or in Greece, the reason why very little emphasis is placed by, say, the Orthodox Church, on people reading the Bible—and in some places, they positively forbid it still—the answer will come back, 'But don't be silly. It's the church that gives you the Bible and, therefore, the church has not only what apostles and people wrote, but all those unwritten things that they taught. And the church is the vehicle that contains all the unwritten tradition, and it's the church that gave you the Bible, and as the church, we're telling you that the main and most important thing is not the Bible, but to listen to the church.'

That is a very big claim, but what does it mean? How many millions have there been in the church since the day of Pentecost and did all of them give us the Bible? When they say that the church gives you the Bible, what they mean is the teaching authority within the church—the Curia in the Roman Catholic sense or the ecumenical councils in the Orthodox sense. But the church did not give us the Bible. Christ gave the Bible to the church via his apostles and other writers. The church is not above the Bible, therefore. The church stands under the Bible. When Paul writes, 'I, Paul, say to you,' as he will in this epistle, half the church says, 'Wait a minute, it's the church that gives us the Bible. The church has the ultimate right to interpret it.' Not so. The church stands under the Bible and must yield to its authority. That is very important. That's not splitting hairs. That belongs to our basic freedom.

The canon of Scripture

That also applies in the larger sense to the question of what the Bible contains. Who decides which books should be in the Bible or shouldn't be in the Bible? The answer some would give is that the church decides it. That is manifestly not true. If you look through history, when the church recognized the canon, they recognized it *fait accompli*. They were simply recognizing officially what was already accepted and regarded as authoritative by Christian people. It is not true that the church gives the Bible authority. Including a book of Scripture

in the canon is not a way of giving that book authority. It's the other way round. It's because the book has authority and that authority is recognized; and therefore the book is in that sense accepted into the canon because it is authoritative. The church doesn't give the Bible its authority, in other words. That is exceedingly important and, as you see, it pertains to our freedom in the practical sense.

In the bad old days it used to be said, in Spain for instance where I worked very frequently, under Franco and all the rest of them, that the church gives you the Bible. The church also gives you the mass and the church tells you it's far more important to attend the mass than it is for you to read the Bible. You cannot come and understand it yourself. You may read it, but don't you try and understand it. You must accept the interpretation of the church. This is a key issue and it pertains to people's freedom. It is therefore worth clueing ourselves up on these matters, not to be argumentative, but if we love people and are concerned for their freedom, then this is very important. If you were in a country like Russia or Serbia or Bulgaria, you would meet the question.

AUDIENCE: Can I ask you how it all came together? How did the canon come together into what we know as the Old and New Testaments?

DWG: That's a very interesting question, and of practical importance. If you're interested in getting people studying the Bible, then underneath somewhere, these are matters of very big practical concern. Nowadays, the United Bible Societies have taken to the practice of publishing Bibles with the Old Testament *Apocrypha* attached. That has been a very big change in policy and it raises some very big questions. For example, the Apocrypha teaches purgatory. If you're going to witness to people who hold to the doctrine of purgatory, you're going to have a very difficult job to show it isn't in the Bible if your Bible has the Apocrypha in it!

Secondly, who decides whether this Apocrypha should be in the Bible or not? Some will say the church decides it. That is false of course, for the reasons we have already considered. If you accept the Old Testament Apocrypha in your Bible, you may do it because a church or denomination somewhere said so, but do you really want to accept that? That has very far-reaching implications. And thirdly, do just imagine coming to an atheist with a Bible that includes the Apocrypha with all those stories—Bell and the Dragon and such like—and having to argue to your atheist friends that these are inspired. What absolute nonsense and piffle it is, with one of the chaps saying, as he does at the end of 2 Maccabees, 'I fear I've made a lot of mistakes, but I've done the best I could. Don't criticize me too badly.' Imagine that kind of thing in the Bible—the inspired word of God! So we need to inform ourselves on these matters.

Why there has been this big move is a complicated thing, but it's been made much easier because, in the liberal sections of the Protestant Church, the question of what is or isn't in the Bible has become almost irrelevant. About thirty years ago, I sat in Queen's University and listened to a theologian, Professor C. F. Evans of London University, discoursing on the Bible. He told the gathered assembly that the Bible was like an electric light hanging down from the ceiling. At the centre of the room, it was very bright, but as you moved out from the centre, it was not quite so bright. Presently, you got to a distance, near the edges, when it was more dark than it was bright, and in the end, you couldn't distinguish the light from the

darkness. That was what the Bible was and therefore, the question of what the canon is, was nowadays irrelevant, because the Bible itself was light in its central bits, wherever they might be placed, and progressively darker and darker as you get to the edges of the Bible. The audience in Queen's clapped his lecture. I'm afraid I didn't clap. If the canon of Scripture is like that, if the Bible itself is like that, you don't need to bother whether the Apocrypha is in it or out of it, do you? That is serious.

AUDIENCE: The Jewish canon of Scripture never included the Apocrypha and Jesus never quoted from them.

DWG: That's right. Actually the question of the Old Testament and the Apocrypha—or what are now called the *Deuterocanonicals* in theological circles, because it sounds more elevated—is easy to answer. The Jews of our Lord's time never did recognize what are now called the Deuterocanonical, or Apocryphal books. They're not likely to have done either. Some of the books in the Apocrypha are a translation of Hebrew works, but some are written straight in Greek. No Jew of our Lord's day would have accepted a book that was composed straight in Greek as part of the canon of the Old Testament. And if you follow our Lord and his idea of the canon, it is the canon that we now have. You see that from various observations. Our Lord in his resurrection, Luke 24, preached to them all things that were written in Moses, in the Prophets and in the Psalms. They are the three divisions of the Hebrew canon. Moses has the first five books, the Prophets are the former prophets and the latter prophets.

The former prophets are the historical books—Joshua, Judges, first and second Samuel, first and second Kings. The Jews regarded them as prophetic writings. They are prophetic interpretations of history, of course. The latter prophets being the big prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the minor prophets, as we call them, though Daniel isn't included in that lot, and all of Lamentations. Then the third division, called the Psalms sometimes, because the psalms were the biggest component, or the writings, *Ketuvim*, and they contained the rest of the canonical books, including first and second Chronicles. So our Lord is witness to this. Likewise in his remark about the blood of the martyrs, from Abel to Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the house. Abel of course comes in Genesis and in the Jewish canon, second Chronicles is the last book of the third division, and it is Chronicles that tells us of the assassination of the Prophet Zechariah in the court of the house of the Lord. So our Lord is quoting the martyrs from one end of the canon to the other, so to speak, so that is very important.

It's also to be noted why those non-canonical books came to be included with the Scriptures in some places. Among the Jews, as you know, their books of Scripture were each written on individual scrolls, and the Jews went on writing their Scriptures in scrolls for quite a while, even in the Christian era. The early Christians, however, partly because they were poor, I suspect, and maybe for other reasons, began to use the book form—what we call a codex. That's much handier, and you can get far more in a book than you can in a scroll. Now when they came to write the Scriptures in a book, they had to produce each scroll and copy it into the book. In some parts of Christendom, in the century after the apostles, there were circulating all these other bits of literature. Just like if I came to your

library, I might well see a Bible on your shelf and beside it, there'd be a prayer book maybe, and then beside it there would be a book by John Stott, and here would be John Bunyan. The fact that they stood side-by-side on your bookshelf wouldn't mean you gave them all equal authority, but some of the Christians began including all these other things in the codex. It is the fact that now, if you look at the big manuscript codices containing the New Testament and the Old Testament, you will not find two that have the same list of Apocryphal books: they all have a different list. And in the big manuscripts, like *Vaticanus B* and *Alexandrinus A*, there are far more of these other books than are commonly accepted even in the Apocrypha. It's very complicated. It happened in part because, by that time, very few Christians knew Hebrew any more. Even great scholars like Saint Augustine didn't know any Hebrew and he couldn't check the thing. Eventually, the Old Testament in Hebrew was translated into Greek, before the Christian era, and when the Christian missionaries went to Greek-speaking countries, they took with them these Greek translations already in existence and used them in their missionary work.

So then these books got incorporated into the Greek Old Testament and from that, they were translated into Latin in countries like North Africa and Italy. So the first Latin Bible, the Old Latin Bible, was a translation of a Greek translation of the Hebrew, and a pretty pickle the translation turned out to be, absolute gibberish in some parts. The missionaries used it as the best translation they had and, God be praised, he very often uses the poorest of translations. There's enough of the gospel in it to see folk converted.

But then one of the Popes got dissatisfied with this situation and he asked Jerome to revise the old Latin, which was in a terrible state, because people had started to revise it in bits and pieces all over the place. Now Jerome was a very good Hebrew scholar. He lived in Bethlehem in Palestine, and learnt Hebrew from the Jewish rabbis: a very unusual type was Jerome, to keep that contact with the Jews. He tried to revise the old Latin and gave up in despair—it was such an impossible mess. So he decided to translate the Bible, the Old Testament, straight from the Hebrew into Latin, which he did. And that became eventually known as the *Vulgate*, the great Roman Catholic Latin translation of the Old Testament and of the New, accepted thereafter for centuries by the Roman Catholic Church.

Jerome would not have the Apocrypha as part of his translation and called it by some very unparliamentarily names—he was a rather irritable old boy! There arose a colossal dispute between him and St. Augustine, who was all for the Apocrypha. If you are that way minded and you have a spare Thursday afternoon, you could go down to Queen's and get out the correspondence between Jerome and St. Augustine and read it still. Augustine's arguments are pitiful, compared to the scholarly arguments of Jerome. But there was also a practical side to it. St. Augustine was concerned that bishops could be in an embarrassing situation if, because they didn't know Hebrew, they couldn't tell their congregation what was or was not part of the Old Testament and would have to appeal to the Jews to tell them! Well I suppose that's a consideration. These are things to be remembered.

We need to remember our church history; and if you remember back to yesterday, I was pointing out how that after the initial paragraphs, when Paul establishes his authority as apostle, he goes off into a large wodge of church history. Not in the modern, conventional sense of the church fathers, etc. but what happened right from the first days onwards. It's

important that we know that bit of church history. The question with the New Testament canon is a bit more complicated, but worth exploring. It's worth getting it under our belts one of these days. There are some knowledgeable individuals who have a genuine reverence for the Apocrypha and the issue might come up, even in an evangelistic session, and you would need to have some factual knowledge about it.

Paul's preaching vindicated

Coming back to Galatians, we noticed that Paul was in Arabia then, and he didn't get the gospel from others. The next thing is that he went up to Jerusalem on his own initiative, as a result of a revelation from the Lord. And when he got to the apostles at Jerusalem and told them what he preached, they added nothing to him. So that it wasn't a question of the apostles in Jerusalem saying, 'Well, Paul, you've got it seventy-five percent right, but we shall have to add certain things. You haven't got a complete gospel.' On the contrary, they added nothing to him (2:6). And then finally we noticed yesterday that sad episode involving Peter, one of the leading apostles who, when it came to expressing doctrine was totally with Paul and absolutely believed the same thing. Nonetheless he had to be rebuked by Paul publicly at the conference at Antioch, because he didn't always behave consistently with what he believed. So we too must learn that we must not, by our behaviour, compromise the gospel.

Arguing from experience

Now let's not spend too long over this. I'm hoping before tomorrow ends we should do another epistle as well as this, and we're not looking this morning for choice devotional words, but for arguments—how we argue. The next big argument is an argument from experience.

O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith? (Gal 3:1–5)

And the answer to it is going to be in verse 6: 'Just as Abraham "believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness"'—so it was by faith. It is of course proper to argue from experience; and in our witnessing for the Lord, sometimes experience is almost the best thing you can do and the first thing that you do. 'I used to be a wife beater and a drunkard and a drug taker, and all these things, and look at me now.' 'My house was a pigsty, my children were in rags, my wife was a nervous wreck. Now look at my home and my charming wife and my children.' That's good experience. It only takes up five verses here. 'How did you get saved?' in other words. 'When did you get the Holy Spirit with all the wonders of his ministry among you? When did you experience that peace with God, and the

pouring out of the love of God in your heart? The new birth—how did that come about and by what message?’

Paul makes it clear, ‘Before your eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified.’ What vigorous imagery that is, describing his preaching. What he did was to set forth Jesus Christ, crucified, like a great tableau in front of them, so that eyes and ears should be impressed by this message. ‘This is the gospel—Jesus Christ, crucified.’ And it was by faith in the crucified Son of God that they received the Spirit, not by circumcision. ‘Well if you’ve begun in the Spirit, are you now going to proceed in the flesh?’

You see, when all is said and done, important as Christian progress is, it isn’t as important as that great absolute fundamental and immeasurably important step that brings a man out of darkness into light; that takes a woman, dead in trespasses and in sins, and gives her life. That means you cease to be simply a creature of God and become a child of God. That move is the biggest thing that will ever happen to anybody. That is the colossal great thing and if that was done by the Spirit, so also the rest will be, and not by the works of the law. To settle the point, he quotes their experience, ‘How did you get converted? By what message? Listening to what message did you get converted?’

Arguing from Scripture

But he doesn’t leave it just to experience. He answers their question for them, and now comes an argument that is a battery of Scripture quotations. Do you notice that? From verses 6–14, there is a set of arguments based on how many Scriptures? Have you counted them? What a technique for arguing! Look at verse 6: ‘Just as Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness.’ This is a quotation from where?

AUDIENCE: Genesis.

DWG: Genesis 15:6, yes. ‘Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed”’ (Gal 3:7–8).

‘So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with the Abraham, the man of faith. For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them”’ (vv. 9–10). And where is that a quotation from?

AUDIENCE: Deuteronomy.

DWG: Deuteronomy 27:26. What about this one: ‘Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith”’ (v. 11).

AUDIENCE: Habakkuk.

DWG: Yes. Habakkuk 2:4. ‘But the law is not of faith, rather “The one who does them shall live by them”’ (v. 12)—where is that from?

AUDIENCE: Leviticus.

DWG: Leviticus, quite (18:5). 'Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"' (v. 13); and where is that from?

AUDIENCE: Deuteronomy 21:23.

Six quotations, fired off like rapid machine gun. On the surface that tells us something about arguing. At certain places it is very important to have actual verses of the Bible at one's fingertips and to know where to find them in the Bible. Even if you have to have a list written for you in the Bible, that's jolly good stuff. It's no good saying, 'You need to be born again, like the Bible says. I can't tell you where it is now, but it's there somewhere.' That's no use, is it? You've got to have them at your fingertips. And here is Paul, because he did a lot of this kind of personal work and preaching in the marketplace and in the synagogue and had to answer people's objections, and he knew he had them at his fingertips—the Scripture that nails this or that objection. Notice that these aren't just random verses. It's the pursuance of an argument that he will have used on many occasions. Knowing the kind of reaction he would get if he cited one Scripture, he would need to nail that reaction by another Scripture.

This is how he proceeded. 'So how do you get converted?' He didn't leave them to tell him; he told them. 'Just as Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness.' That is not a type or a parable. It's an actual case—what the lawyers would call a precedent in case law. If Abraham was justified by faith, then anybody can be and everybody must be. This sets the precedent. And when did he get justified? Was Abraham justified at the final judgment? Well certainly not. He was justified (Gen 15:6), and the terms were spelt out, 'justified by faith'. 'Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.'

But now somebody had got an objection perhaps, 'Yes, but that was Abraham. It doesn't necessarily apply to us Gentiles.'

'Oh, yes it does,' says Paul, and proceeds to quote Genesis 12:3 and 18:18. 'The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed."'

'What do you mean "in you"?'

Well just as he has explained in verse 7, those that are of faith are in that sense spiritual sons of Abraham. He was the prototype, the case law precedent, and they that are of faith are his spiritual children. Paul is going to argue that throughout this epistle.

'Ah, yes,' somebody says. 'I'm a dear son of Abraham. I believe like Abraham did. In fact, I have strong faith and I do believe that if I keep the law and do the best I can to keep God's law, I shall be saved.' No, strong faith that if you keep the law you'll be justified, is not Abraham's faith. 'So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the man of faith. For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse'. So that deals with this question, 'What do you mean by faith?'. Abraham believed. Does that mean he had great faith that he could keep God's law, and if he kept it well he would be saved? No, that's

impossible. For if you take your stand on keeping the law, instead of getting justified, you are cursed.

I do remember, just after the war, we in our church inherited the right to go into the local Corn Exchange in Cambridge city, which was turned into a rough cafeteria at weekends, because rationing was still on and the people were not fed very well. You could go in there and buy doorstep sandwiches and mugs of tea or cocoa, and people used to come in off the streets on a Sunday night. And we had the right to go in, stand up in a corner with a microphone and piano accordion, and we sang hymns and choruses and we preached about twenty minutes. Afterwards we bought ourselves a cup of tea and went round the tables and sat with the folks and got talking if we could, and gave out our tracts.

One Sunday, I came across a table and they turned out to be all Irish folks from the promised land! They were very pleasant, but they told me that what we said was very seriously wrong. We'd been preaching on how you can know you're saved.

'You can't know you're saved,' they said.

'Really, is that so? I thought you could.'

'No, you can't.'

'Well, can you show me from the Bible that you can't? I believe the Bible and you believe the Bible too, don't you? So if you can start me off there and show me that I'm wrong, well then I want to be corrected. I don't want to live in a false paradise. You show me where in the Bible it says you can't be sure you're saved.'

'We haven't got a Bible with us.'

'I have a Bible here, now you show me.'

Well they didn't know where it quite was, but I said, 'Will you take it away and read it and show me, and we'll meet next week?' And that led to months with two of them particularly, who used to come to our rooms in Trinity or elsewhere with a friend of mine and we used to search the Scriptures. And they used to bring along tracts from the Catholic Truth Society, which I read diligently, and when we met I said, 'Well I read that. That was very interesting, but I couldn't understand what it says here, because the Bible seems to say the opposite.' I do remember them telling me once that you have to keep the commandments, so I said, 'Oh, you have to keep the commandments to be saved?'

'Yes.'

I said, 'How well have you kept them?'

'Well,' said Bridget, 'fairly well. I mean to say, "You shall have no other gods"; we don't have any other gods, do we?' she said to her sister.

'No.'

'No, right. No, we don't bow down to idols, do we?'

'No.'

'"And you shall not commit adultery". We haven't committed adultery, have we?'

'No.'

'"Honour your father", oh we do! We don't steal.'

So they decided they kept the lot. I congratulated them, said it was marvellous. That's what you have to do you see, and they brought me the tract, 'This is how you have to do it to be saved.'

So when they came, I said, 'Well this is the bit I don't understand. You're saying to me if you keep the whole law then you can be saved?'

'Yes.'

'What about this?' I asked, and I opened to Galatians 3:10, in Knox's translation, and got them to read it, 'All who take their stand on the law are under a curse'. Wow. You could see the colour drain out of their face, for they were sincere Catholics. Well, you see the point of the argumentation. First it's Abraham, but does it apply to Abraham only? What about Gentiles?'

'Ah, yes, we've got a Scripture to cover that point. It applies to Gentiles.'

'Yes, but I have great faith that if I keep the law I shall be saved: that's what faith means.'

'Well no, it doesn't.'

So we see Paul using Scripture like a shepherd with a sheepdog. The sheep goes one way, he's going to block that door. If the sheep goes the other way, he's got a Scripture to say, "No you don't." Paul was used to that type of thing: he'd led thousands to the Lord. It's good to have Scriptures at our fingertips, at each turn.

'Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them'.

'Oh,' says somebody, 'yes, well that's right. If you don't keep the whole lot, of course you'll come unstuck, but I think I can keep the whole lot'—like my two girlfriends from Ireland! 'I feel I can keep the lot by God's help. I have great faith in that.'

Well that's no good anyway. 'It is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith"'.

'What do you mean "faith"?'

'The law is not of faith', so two quotations now, having great faith that if you keep the law, you'll be alright. No, that is not what faith means, 'the law is not of faith'.

'What is it then?'

'He who does them shall live in them' and in Pauline theology, doing and faith in this sense, are opposites. That is very important to see.

'Well then, if the law is not of faith, how can we get saved?'

'Oh,' says somebody, 'Christ kept the law for us.'

No, he didn't. He did keep the law, that's true, and if he hadn't kept the law, he would have been a sinner and he couldn't have saved us. But he didn't save us by keeping the law. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. Not by keeping the law and giving us an example, but taking upon himself the curse of the law that we deserved, the curse of a broken law—that's how we get saved.

Then another Scripture, his sixth in the row: 'For it is written, cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree'. And you can see from that, the final climax of that series of quotations, the kind of gospel he preached. 'I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified' (1 Cor 2:2). He did not preach the Sermon on the Mount. As J. B. Phillips noticed a long time ago, if you read the Acts of the Apostles and the evangelization of the apostles, you will scarce find one citation from the Sermon on the Mount in the book of Acts. It's not that the apostles didn't believe in morality. They would have denounced sin, as you see Paul doing in Romans 1–3, but in the actual record of the sermons they preached in the

Acts of the Apostles, it was the death and the resurrection of Christ that they preached. That is the gospel. So “‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree” —so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.’

Six compact quotations; know where to find them, how they apply and what each one is being used to deal with in the twists and turns of the discussion. That’s a very important method of arguing.

Using an Old Testament parallel

Then comes a long argument from the Old Testament, and a very technical one.

To give a human example, brothers: even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified. Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, ‘And to offsprings’, referring to many, but referring to one, ‘And to your offspring’, who is Christ. This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterwards, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void. For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise. (3:15–18)

Now what on earth is all that about? It’s not the kind of stuff that you raise in your preliminary, first stage evangelistic Bible study with a group of downright atheists! Why bother about it then? Because you’ll find a lot of your fellow believers need to know what this is saying. For what we now meet is this: Paul is out to maintain and demonstrate that justification is by faith. In order to show that justification is by faith, he now demonstrates that certain other things are by faith too. The blessings of Abraham are by faith: he’s just said it—that the blessings of Abraham might come upon us Gentiles.

And then the promises in the plural are through faith, and the covenant is through faith. Not only the initial justification then, but the blessings and the promises and the covenant, all these are by faith. The importance of this is that you will find, from time to time, dear Christian folks that are quite clear that justification is by faith, but they think the inheritance isn’t. Some of them go so far as to say a believer can miss the inheritance altogether. So now it’s worth our while giving heed to this next lot of arguments and not merely from an argumentative point of view but so that we might ourselves be rejoicing in the colossal salvation we have. One of life’s difficulties is convincing believers that they are wealthier than they think they are! You’d be surprised how difficult it is to convince them.

AUDIENCE: Can I ask a question at that point? I was with believers who, two or three weeks ago, told me they were astonished by this teaching about being saved and knowing you’re saved and saved for all eternity.

DWG: They didn’t like that?

AUDIENCE: No, they did not. I think they were Armenians.

DWG: As you probably know, it’s not only Christian folks in this part of the world who hold such views. Many feel that they can fall away and be lost forever. It used to be that in The

Salvation Army, they had to swear an oath upon conversion. It had ten conditions, one of which was that they would serve God in the ranks of *The Salvation Army* for the rest of their lives. One of the other conditions was that they swore before God that they did believe that a true believer could fall away and be lost in hell forever. The further east you go into Eastern Europe, the more you'll find that is a predominant view amongst believers. They get very distressed if preachers come along and preach what we call eternal security.

You may ask me if it is worthwhile troubling to try to correct their thinking. My answer to that would be, here are dear believers in Romania, in Bulgaria and places like that who have suffered enormously, and they look at us in the West and they feel that what we're preaching is such a heresy as would encourage believers to misbehave: that it doesn't matter how you behave, you're still saved. To them that is outrageous. When you've had situations in churches where the elders of the church have been doing work with young people, for instance, and in cases I know of, the secret police have put pressure on a couple of chaps in the church until eventually they got those two fellows so scared that they betrayed the two elders in the church, and the two elders were put in prison. You try telling the elders of that church that those two fellows who betrayed them were saved eternally. You can see their difficulty, can't you? Pastorally too.

Take an analogy. A father goes upstairs one night and his seven-year-old daughter is still awake at midnight, and he says, 'Dear, what's wrong? Why aren't you asleep?'

'I'm afraid you're going to throw me out and give me to the dustbin man.'

And dad says, 'No, my dear. I'd never do that.'

'But you said the other day, "I'll give you to the dustbin man." I'm afraid you're going to throw me to the dustbin man.'

So what does the father say now? Does he turn round and say, 'You wicked girl. If you go on believing I would ever throw you out, I will throw you out'? That would be daft, wouldn't it? If you find folks who can't believe that they are eternally secure, the first thing you must not do is to frighten them. It's a question of God gaining their confidence. If their view of God is that he's a God who could eventually throw them out, you don't charge them with heresy and scare the daylights out of them. You might have to leave it and say, 'Well, I personally believe that you can be eternally sure.' This is something that the Lord will show them eventually through his word. Very often these things come not simply by a text that proves it, in a 'proof text' sense. They come as the very heart of God is revealed to them through his word, and they sense the arms of the Father around the neck of the prodigal.

AUDIENCE: How do we preach some of these things? Obviously, if we're teaching a particular course on church history and the origins of certain denominations, it's bound to come up. Does it come down to one's experience, like when you were mentioning those folks in Eastern Europe? Because of their personal experiences and what they're going through, they read into the Scriptures in a certain way, and others maybe look at particular verses in another way, because they don't have that experience.

DWG: I will be needing to be taught by you, how you found the Lord helped you in this circumstance. I think it's a grave pity that so often this thing has been argued as though it were a debate between Calvinists and Arminians. I'm not a Calvinist, but I wouldn't like it if

you said I was an Arminian either! Whatever I am, I think Paul is wiser. Some people say, 'I am of Paul', and somebody else says, 'I'm of Apollos'. Well you shouldn't be either anyway. We shouldn't be of Calvin or of Arminius. The labels may be useful shorthand sometimes in theological debate, but to raise that whole question simply on those grounds is unhelpful.

Round the parts of East Anglia, notably in the villages around Cambridgeshire, where Spurgeon ministered as a young man, you could find in days gone by very strong Calvinists who had no assurance of salvation whatsoever. A friend of mine was conducting a tent mission in some of those villages and he visited a gentleman who was over eighty years of age and he'd been attending a very strict Baptist church, strict in the Calvinist sense, all his life, but he had no assurance of salvation. Why not? Well the elect, according to them, can be absolutely sure they're saved. The trouble is to know whether you are the elect or not. That's the difficulty. If you could be sure you are the elect, you can be sure of salvation.

Then in some circles, it comes down to the doctrine of evidences. If you are elect, there'll be evidence, so you have to look around for the evidence and one of their favourite verses was 'I will take away the heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh' (Ezek 36:26). And this poor old man told my friend, 'My brother once upon a time broke down and wept. I think that's evidence that he might have a heart of flesh instead of a heart of stone. But I've never been able to weep.' So here they are, with eyes on their own emotions, and in the end, whether they're saved or not now appears to depend on their emotions. That's extreme Calvinism. It gives you no more assurance than the extreme Armenian.

I think it's a pity to raise it on that score, but if you ask, I think there are two things that are important. One is we need ourselves to be sure that what we teach is what Scripture says. There is big debate at that level. I told you the other day that last year I had a Romanian Baptist pastor living with me for three months or so. He used to believe in the eternal security of the believer, he told me. Now he doesn't and it's a raging matter in Romania. I fear it's going to split many churches. We had long discussions and I took it as a very great compliment what he said to me last time. As he came with one of his revised ideas which seemed to him to be marvellously supporting his view, I said, 'Yes, that's very interesting. I could think of parallels of that.' So I drew out some ideas on a bit of paper and of course they led to conclusions that he didn't altogether want them to lead to. But he said, 'Well at least you don't beat us over the head with it.' Pastorally, you don't beat people over the head with it, but let God reveal himself and warm their hearts and instil the confidence in him. On the theological side, we've got to be sure that we're preaching the truth. What about those other Scriptures that seem to actually say you can fall away and be lost—'the branch that doesn't abide in the vine gets put in the fire' (John 15:5–6, own trans.), for instance. What about that? So we have to be sure ourselves on the theological side, and argue we must. But listen to how Paul would do it, not in any bitter spirit but humbly saying, 'Is this what the verse says?'

Yes, we need to be sure ourselves, and what I would want to do in a passage like this is to take this matter of a great inheritance. Paul is explaining that we're not only justified by faith, but there are various other things that are also by faith. There are all the marvellous promises of Abraham and then there is the inheritance and the covenant. What a marvellous thing this is, and he comes round to the grand conclusion, 'If you are in Christ, then are you

Abraham's offspring and heirs according to the promise' —heirs of all this vast inheritance. God is getting at our hearts and getting across the wealth of the gospel. So we need to know what the covenant means and is, and what kind of a covenant it is.

Galatians—How to Argue (3)

Using Analogy

Now, ladies and gentlemen, when arguing we have to be very careful with analogies. Analogies don't prove anything. They are only useful when they illustrate what is true. Analogies are useful if they help people to see the distinction between two things that hitherto they are confusing, but analogies don't prove anything. You'll always have to ask whether the analogy is appropriate. Somebody says to you, 'You say salvation is by faith, but it isn't like that. We have to do our part and God does his, and if we do our part, God will do his. Salvation is like the village pump. If you go to a village pump, you can't get water out of it directly. You have to prime the pump. You have to put some water in and then you'll get a lot more water out and that's how it is with us. Salvation is like the village pump. You have to put your part in and be as good as you can be, and then God will do his bit.'

It's a very nice analogy of the pump, but who said salvation was like the village pump? The analogy doesn't prove anything. It may illustrate what that man is arguing for, but it doesn't prove it's true. We need to be aware of that when we're arguing.

Analogy of child and father

The analogy of child and father, of course, is a biblical analogy, used everywhere by the Bible itself. Here in Galatians 4, Paul is illustrating the point. In a big household where they had slaves, among the slaves would be a *paidagogos*, who was in charge of the children of a certain age onwards. He took them to school, he saw after their behaviour when they were there and he brought them back from school. He protected them. If need be, he chastised them. The children were under him and the child, in that sense, was little more than a slave, put under that regime by the father, with the external *paidagogos* controlling him and seeing he learnt his lessons and so forth. Of course that system was stopped when the child grew up and became a full-grown son. That is the point Paul is making. In Judaism, God treated Israel as little children, not heirs of all. He put them in the position of slaves, under a *paidagogos*, in the form of the law, to chastise them when need be, to guide them, to take them to school, to make them learn their lessons, to show them how naughty they were. But now, there's been a vast change.

Pentecost has made a world of difference. Now that God has sent forth his spirit into our hearts, we're no more slaves. We are grown-up sons and daughters of the living God, moved by God's own spirit. When I was a child, I had to be warned not to run in from the

garden with mud all over my shoes, and across the carpet. I had to be told that appropriate action would be taken if I forgot and committed this offence. I hadn't got any notion of how much carpets cost and the aesthetic beauty of carpets and things like that. Football to me was much more important. I was promised six of the best therefore if I forgot the rules. Now I don't have to be threatened with six of the best. Why not? Well I've grown up. I have the spirit of my Father in me anyway. That's a different principle. That's how it is with the believer now—a child of God and indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God. A different guiding principle in life, as well as a different power; and a different relationship with the Father.

So Paul is answering the question, 'What is the purpose of the law?' He's got to have an answer for that. He can't just neglect it, and we who are Christians have got to watch that too. Sometimes, in stressing that salvation is by faith and not by the law, we give the impression it doesn't matter how you behave and, alas, sometimes our behaviour in business seems to suggest that's what we believe. We've got to come to a positive explanation of why God gave the law, and why it is that nowadays we're not saved by the law but through faith in Christ. And with that, Paul turns once more to an argument from experience, pointing out to them now that instead of making progress, they're going backwards. Going back to bondage, observing days and months and seasons and years—the old external trappings of religion. How folks do tend to go backwards, don't they?

And then he adds another test of experience. They're going back into slavish things, and this supposed new doctrine that they are imbibing has grievously affected their attitude to the Apostle Paul.

You know it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first, and though my condition was a trial to you, you did not scorn or despise me, but received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus. What then has become of the blessing you felt? For I testify to you that, if possible, you would have gouged out your eyes and given them to me. Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth? They make much of you, but for no good purpose. They want to shut you out, that you may make much of them. It is always good to be made much of for a good purpose, and not only when I am present with you, my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you! I wish I could be present with you now and change my tone, for I am perplexed about you. (4:13–20)

The mark of this wrong doctrine is that it grievously changed their personal attitude to the Apostle Paul. Ladies and gentlemen, I would want to generalize from that. Find me a doctrine that makes you appreciate Paul less than you once did—that's a mark that your doctrine is very questionable. Actually, if you got hold of the right gospel, you'd be over the moon with Paul. Granted, he was the least popular apostle in his own days, but he's the man to whom we owe our Christian liberty, the great proponent of justification by faith. The man not only revolutionized the world in his day, but he revolutionized it again at the great reformation: it was his writings that led to it. Look at the wealth and the wonder of peace with God, of justification by faith, the promises of the inheritance, of the covenant. Magnificent stuff. We owe that to Paul. A doctrine that makes you less keen on Paul is a token that it's very poor.

An Old Testament parallel

But now in verses 21–31, we have a most interesting argument, but one that is a little difficult to put across to folks nowadays.

Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise. Now this may be interpreted allegorically. (4:21–24)

But what Paul means by ‘allegorically’ you have to decide from what you find Paul now doing.

These women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. For it is written, ‘Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear; break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labour! For the children of the desolate one will be more than those of the one who has a husband.’ Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now. But what does the Scripture say? ‘Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman.’ So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman. For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. (4:24–5:1)

It’s a very interesting passage. It shows first that Paul believed Genesis! And he believed it so strongly that the command of God to Abraham to cast out the slave woman and her son, Paul quotes now as an exhortation that we should give ear to, ‘Cast out the slave woman and her son.’

What shall we make of this? Some commentaries will tell you that this was Paul using allegory because some of the Jewish rabbis used allegory and therefore they would have been convinced by this kind of argument. So did Paul use an argument that wasn’t really sound, but it worked with the rabbis because they didn’t see it wasn’t sound? That’s not a sound method of interpreting Scripture, and is tantamount to saying that this argument in inspired Scripture is invalid! That’s what is taught in some places but that cannot be right. So how shall we understand this use of the Old Testament?

Now let us notice as a method of arguing, when it comes to arguing from Scripture, first Paul used those explicit verses. There were half a dozen of them—actual explicit statements of Old Testament that he used first. Not this figurative story first, but the explicit statements first. Some people, when they try to prove a thing, they’ll go to Old Testament pictures first. But it is better to establish the truth of your doctrine by the explicit statements—clear, straightforward statements of Scripture. That was the first lot and then there followed the legal argument from the Old Testament. That wasn’t a type or a figure or a symbol. That was a literal fellow, and God made him a promise and a covenant. He was justified by faith.

He was given this literal covenant that he should be heir. That was applying the Old Testament literally and legally.

It's only now that he comes to the other method that is rightly used in Old Testament—to interpret Old Testament as a prototype. What do we mean by 'prototype'? Well let's take an example that we shall all be familiar with—the way the New Testament expounds the Passover. The Passover in Israel was not a prophecy. It was an annual festival in which the Israelites were reminded of past history. It was a remembrance of how the people had been slaves in Egypt and God had redeemed them through the blood of the Passover lamb. Yet, when our Lord came to the Lord's Supper and sat with his apostles, he said, 'I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God' (Luke 22:15–16).

What did he mean by 'fulfilled'? If you predict that Messiah is going to be born in Bethlehem, that will be fulfilled when Messiah is born in Bethlehem. That's fulfilling a prediction, but Passover wasn't a prediction. It was a memorial of that ancient history when they were redeemed out of Egypt's bondage. They were redeemed from the destroying angel by the blood of the Passover lamb. How can Christ say that the Passover is going to be fulfilled? Fulfilled in what sense? And the answer is that it's fulfilled in one of the senses in which that word is used in the Bible. Israel's deliverance out of Egypt years and years ago involved certain principles of redemption at that lowly level. There was the wrath of God, expressed through the destroying angel. There was the bondage of Pharaoh and, when the judgment came, they were delivered from the judgment by the blood of a Passover lamb. There, at that very lowly level, was that basic principle of redemption expressed.

Now in Christ those same principles are going to be expressed at an infinitely higher level. We are under the wrath of God and in danger of his judgment. We are in the grip of, not a pharaoh, but of Satan. We are redeemed, not with the blood of a lamb, but with the precious blood of Christ. Do you see the principle is the same? It is at the infinitely higher level and in that sense, when Jesus died, it was a fulfilment of the Passover—the expression of those principles at the higher level. Now we shall see that in Abraham's own historical experience, he was literally justified by faith and given a literal promise of the inheritance. But now watch what happens in his history and you will see certain principles at work. And when you've mastered them and you come to what Christ has done for us and is doing for us now, you will see those same principles illustrated at an infinitely higher level.

So let's go back to Galatians 3:19. 'Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise has been made'. Then we go down to Abraham and if you care to turn to Genesis 15, here is Abraham saying to God at the beginning of the chapter, 'I continue childless' (v. 2). 'Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir' (v. 3).

And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: 'This man shall not be your heir; but your very own son shall be your heir.' And he brought him outside and said, 'Look towards heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your offspring be.' And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness. (Gen 15:4–6)

Then God went on to give him the covenant that promised the inheritance—so he was promised the offspring, then he was promised the inheritance, but the offspring wasn't given yet. What then does chapter 16 tell us? Well it's an interesting little story. If you read it through, you'll find it went like this.

A prototype—Abraham and Sarah

God had promised Abraham and Sarah a child and one morning, Sarah suddenly said to Abraham, 'Abraham, dear, I've been thinking about that promise God made us that we're going to have a son and offspring.'

'Yes, my dear,' he said, 'isn't that wonderful?'

'Well I don't know about that, Abraham, because God is acting rather strangely. God said he's going to give us a son, but he's overlooked something.'

'What is that?'

'I'm barren, Abraham. I can't have any children.'

'Oh,' said Abraham, 'I hadn't thought about that.'

'And what's more,' said Sarah, 'God is being a little bit contradictory. One minute he tells us he's going to give us a child, and the next minute he's shut up my womb so I can't have a child.'

'What do you think then, Sarah?'

'What I think is that when God promised us a son, he didn't mean he's going to give us a son just like that. No, God helps those that help themselves. What he meant was that we should use our wits and our resources. It was really an exhortation to us that we've got to produce the offspring, and use our resources.'

Said Abraham, 'I hadn't thought of it like that. I thought it was God who was going to give it.'

'Well in a sense he is, but what he means is you do the best you can and use your own resources.'

'We haven't got any resources, Sarah dear.'

'Oh yes we have: we've got Hagar.'

Hagar was an Egyptian slave girl and, like they did in that part of the world in those days, the chief wife could, if she pleased, give her husband one of the slave girls and the slave girl would produce a child and the child would count as the chief wife's child. So Sarah thought that would be a good thing. 'Everybody does it, Abraham. Any sensible people will tell you this is a very good idea, to have a surrogate mother.' So there was this scheme and Abraham took Hagar and she became pregnant. Lo and behold, as slaves will do sometimes, they get a bit uppish and when she saw she was carrying Abraham's child and her mistress couldn't, well she began to give herself airs and graces, and when the mistress said, 'Do this', she said, 'No. I'm carrying Abraham's child.' That didn't suit Sarah. She wasn't going to have slave girls getting uppish like that and she made life so difficult that Hagar ran away.

The angel of the Lord came and met Hagar and said, 'Now, my dear, what are you doing here?' and she said, 'Sarah has chased me off.' He said, 'This is no place for a girl in your

condition: you'd better go back.' And the angel of the Lord sent Hagar back with wonderful words ringing in her ear:

The angel of the LORD said to her, 'Behold, you are pregnant and shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael, because the LORD has listened to your affliction. He shall be a wild donkey of a man, his hand against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen.' (Gen 16:11–12)

So Hagar came back into Abraham and Sarah's home, and Ishmael was born, and he lived in the home and grew up. Now watch the progress of the story. Chapter 17, God came to Abraham and said, 'You're going to have a son.'

'Yes, I know, Lord, but didn't you mean Ishmael? I mean Ishmael's a very nice chap.'

God said, 'Thank you, Abraham, but not Ishmael. No, I will bless him, but I don't mean Ishmael. I never did mean Ishmael. When I promised you a son, I meant I promised you a son, and that was a word of promise. When I promised I was going to give you a son, that didn't mean that you had to do the best you can.'

Says Abraham, 'But that would take a miracle.'

'I'm prepared to do a miracle,' says God. 'In fact I'm waiting, Abraham, until you're in such a state that your very best won't do anything, and you'll have to depend on me; and that I meant what I said and it was a promise, not an exhortation. I'm going to let you wait, Abraham, until you're hopelessly dependent on me and then I shall give you a son. Thank you for Ishmael, but I don't want him. I'll bless the man, but that's not what I meant and Sarah got it all the wrong way round. When I said I was going to give you a son, I didn't mean you had to do your best and God helps those that help themselves. It was a sheer promise, a gift to be taken from my hand. That's what I meant and that's what it will be.'

So God left them. Sarah had always been barren, but now Abraham was positively decrepit, his body as good as dead, absolutely helpless. He could see the point, as Romans 4:19 points out: 'He saw that he was now as good as dead' and if God would ever fulfil his promise, it would be bringing life out of death, a veritable resurrection. And it happened. The Lord visited Sarah and the promised offspring was born. Abraham put on a great feast the day Isaac was weaned but 'Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, laughing. So she said to Abraham, "Cast out this slave woman with her son"' (Gen 21:9–10). And this time God agreed, and Abraham's son of the slave woman was cast out. So that Hagar and Ishmael were put in until the promised offspring came and then they were cast out.

The story applied

That's what happened in that story. Now you see what Paul is doing. This is Galatians. He starts with Abraham. This is not an allegory. This is Abraham, the real, old physical Abraham, and the promise of offspring. The offspring equals Christ and that's literally true. In the first instance, Abraham's son was Isaac. If there had been no Isaac, there would have been no Jesus, because the promise meant more than just Isaac. It meant Christ, of course. So the promise was actually given to Abraham. This is literal history, and the promise

eventually meant Christ, and then you see the parallel. On the smaller scale, Hagar and Ishmael were put in, in the story of Genesis, and the very moment Isaac the promised seed is born, Ishmael is cast out.

So, says Paul, that provides us with a pattern that was fulfilled at the bigger level. God's promise to Abraham of a child meant Isaac, yes, but it contained more than that. It was a promise eventually of Christ. And presently the law was added, but it was added only until the promised offspring actually came. I'll tell you one or two other things. Chapter 21, the promised son was born, and Ishmael and the slave woman were cast out. Chapter 22, the true promised offspring was sacrificed on Mount Moriah. Fancy that. And the law was added until the promised offspring would come, and what happened to the promised offspring? He was sacrificed, wasn't he?

That's a wonderful story and if you look closely you notice that here, in Genesis 24, Abraham decided it's time the promised son had a wife, and she wasn't to be of the Canaanites. 'Go back to the Gentiles from which I came out,' says Abraham to his servant. So the servant was sent all the way down to the Gentiles, from whom Abraham had been called out, and took the message that, 'My master is rich and he has one son that he loves and he's given him all that he has.' He said to this girl, 'Would you care to be the bride of my master's son?' And the gospel worked and the good lady, being a Gentile, became the second big move from the Gentiles. Abraham had come out of the Gentiles, but now the promised son was born, another came out of the Gentiles. Her name was Rebekah and she came all the way and joined the promised son as his bride.

Do you know anything about Christian history? That the law was given and Israel was under the law until the promised offspring came, and then he was sacrificed, and then there began this next big move out of the Gentiles. Thousands upon thousands coming out of the Gentiles to form, with the believing in Israel, a bride for the promised seed. Extraordinary story!

What is the point of it however? You hear Paul saying, 'Look, brothers, Christ set you free. Understanding that justification is by faith will set you free. Understanding that the inheritance is by faith will set you free. Why do you go back to beggarly elements and teaching people they've got to keep the law to be saved, or they've got to go through some ceremony like circumcision to be saved? That will take them back into slavery.' Instead of accepting the promise of God as meaning a promise of God and believing it and rejoicing in it, they get it into their heads that they've got to produce it by their own efforts. That's what Sarah did. It's no accident that the woman was a slave and the boy who was produced was a son of a slave. God doesn't want slaves. 'The slave does not remain in the house for ever' (John 8:35), says Christ. No, he didn't indeed. He got thrown out. God, with his tremendous purposes for this universe, and for his redeemed people, is not intending to fill heaven with a whole host of slaves.

When you get to heaven one of these days and God sets you the sizeable task of controlling a galaxy of stars, are you going to do that thinking that it all depends on how well you do it; and if you don't do it well enough, you'll get thrown out of heaven? Well heaven would become slavery, wouldn't it? God doesn't want slaves. 'The slave does not remain in the house for ever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be

free indeed.' Oh, what a gospel this is. We have the very spirit of God in our hearts, sons of God, not slaves. We are in the family, because we're born by the spirit of God into the family, and all the inheritance of God is ours, because we are sons of God. That's magnificent stuff! 'Why go back,' says Paul, 'to the beggarly bits of religion and turn yourselves into slaves?' That's Paul arguing. You can feel his very heart coming through.

So how does Scripture manage to get such vivid and exact pictures? It's a prototype, and because the thing's inspired, the same God who knew what he was going to do in raising up Abraham and the Jewish nation and the bringing in of Christ, saw it was necessary in the interval between Abraham and the birth of his Son, to put Israel under the law until the promised offspring should come. The God who knew that in advance organized this, so that it would be a thought pattern to help us understand. That isn't what you preach to your atheist friend in the first course of evangelism that you ever went into! It might help to establish us in our faith. And to your advanced students, this is true biblical exposition that Paul is giving, not some narrow-minded little idea.

In these last five minutes, I just want to mention the next argument after the argument from prototype—chapter 5, from verse 2 onwards. This is a serious argument about the implications that follow if you adopt that false doctrine. 'Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you.' You cannot mix the two. Some people try to do it and are inconsistent, but that inconsistency cannot be allowed to continue. You can't mix grace and works. They are contradictory. So there are serious implications if you were to adopt that false doctrine.

No penalty, but consequences

Then there is another very big argument, from verses 13–26, which is the argument that justification by faith, the inheritance by faith, does not mean that believers are free to live carelessly. Romans would put it that the righteous demand of the law is in fact fulfilled in those that walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit. Paul is saying the same here. Those who are heirs are justified, are children of God, are indwelt by the spirit, and the Holy Spirit of course will lead them and guide them and strive with them, to see that they produce the fruits of the Spirit. That is the secret: that is the power. But then Paul points out, 'If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law' (5:18). They are two different principles of producing holiness, so though we are not under the letter of the law, we do have the Holy Spirit and he is not just a command. He is a person, living, vigorous, vibrant within a believer. 'If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit' (v. 25).

Then from 5:26–6:10, there are other warnings and encouragement. There is no penalty to those who are in Christ, no condemnation: salvation is by grace through faith; there is therefore no condemnation. There's no penalty—but there are consequences. As evangelicals, we would do well to notice the difference between penalty and consequences. If, as a genuine believer, you fall away from the Lord and you give way to alcoholism and you get so bad that you're taking methylated spirits before breakfast every morning, the Lord can bring you back like he brought Peter back. There's no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. But there may be consequences. From drinking methylated spirits like

that, don't be surprised if you end up ruining your health and maybe go home to glory prematurely. Not a penalty, but consequences.

Consider the case of a father who is going away on business and he says to his boy, 'I'm going away for some weeks. Now, see that apple tree there, it's got some little apples coming in bud. When they grow bigger, I don't want you to pluck them because they won't be ripe. You won't be able to eat them and if you eat them, they'll give you a stomach ache. You'll spoil it and there won't be any nice rosy red apples later on. So I'm telling you, don't you be tempted to eat those apples. If you do, when I come home I shall give you six of the best.'

Father comes home eventually and asks, 'Where's Tommy?'

'Oh, he's gone to bed,' says mum, 'he's got a stomach ache.'

The father goes up to see Tommy.

'You're not feeling well, Tommy?'

'No, I've got stomach ache.'

'Have you been eating any of those green apples, Tommy?'

'Yes.'

'And now you've got the stomach ache like I said, haven't you?'

'Yes.'

'What else did I say you would get?'

Tommy collapses in tears, 'No, I'm ever so sorry, Dad. I won't do it again.'

Six of the best was the penalty, but dad in his mercy says, 'Alright, Tommy. This time, I forgive you and I won't give you six of the best.'

Lovely. But that doesn't get rid of the stomach ache immediately, does it?

No penalty for those that are in Christ; consequences, yes. 'The one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life' (6:8). Eternal life is not a thing you can put in a box. It's a thing to be enjoyed and developed with all its potential. 'Sow to the spirit and you will from the Spirit reap eternal life. But the one who sows to the flesh will from the flesh reap corruption'—and eventually tears and disappointments and, in a sense, eternal loss. We shall be lesser people in eternity than otherwise we could have been, simply as a consequence.

Just because you are believers and there is no condemnation, don't start devouring and biting one another in your church, ladies and gentlemen. If you do, you'll be consumed one of another. There are consequences, aren't there? And that's a thing we ought to remember too. First Corinthians 3 reminds us that we are now to build. If we build on the foundation, gold, silver and precious stones, at the judgment seat of Christ, it passes his judgment and not only will our work abide, but we shall get a reward. But suppose we build shoddy stuff like wood, hay and stubble, it will disappear under his criticism at his judgement seat. It'll be burnt up. We ourselves will be saved, because salvation never did depend on our works, but we will suffer loss and the loss is eternal of course. No reward and our works burnt up. That also is a powerful argument in favour of the gospel of justification by faith. It does not mean that our wrong behaviour doesn't matter. There are consequences, even if there is no penalty.

The analogy of the covenant

The final argument is the exposure of the false motives of those who preached salvation by the works of the law, verses 11–16. In order to demonstrate that, according to Scripture, justification is by faith, Paul now proceeds to argue that certain other things likewise are by faith and not by the works of the law, namely the blessings of Abraham, the promises and the covenant. You see it in chapter 3:

To give a human example, brothers: even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified. Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, 'And to offsprings', referring to many, but referring to one, 'And to your offspring', who is Christ. This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterwards, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void. For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise. (3:15–18)

A legal argument then, and we shouldn't allow people to make us ashamed of that. They say, 'God is love. We don't need to know about legal things.' We jolly well do. When it comes to an inheritance, even in ordinary daily life, it has to be tied down by the law. And so with God, when it comes to the great inheritance, it is tied by legal instruments in the Bible itself. We start with this covenant made with Abraham and the argument is that when a covenant has been made—duly signed, sealed and settled—you cannot add conditions to it subsequently. Paul is about to argue that the covenant which God made with Abraham was four hundred and thirty years before the law of Moses and made no mention whatever of the law and all its terms. You cannot therefore add the law of Moses to that covenant as conditions that have to be fulfilled before the blessings of the covenant can be received. That is the argument.

A two-party covenant

Now let me therefore start with the very notion of the covenant itself. In the Bible, there are a number of covenants and the question you'll have to ask about each one is whether a particular covenant is a one-party covenant or a two-party covenant. In modern law, a two-party covenant is a covenant between two parties when both have conditions that they must fulfil. If you want a new house you go along to the builder and you specify all the conditions such as the number of rooms, the quality of the material and so forth. That is put down in the covenant. The builder in turn says, 'If that's what I've got to fulfil, what you've got to fulfil is this—your house will cost you one million pounds!' It's a two-party covenant. He has to build you the house and you have to pay him the money. If he doesn't fulfil all the conditions and skimps on the materials, you don't pay him the money. If he builds the house to the proper specifications and you don't pay the money, you don't get the house. It is a two-party covenant.

Now in the ancient world, when you had a two-party covenant, one of the ways of signing and sealing a covenant was that you had a sacrifice. You got some animals and birds; the animals you cut up into pieces, though you didn't cut the birds in pieces. You put

the pieces and the birds in two rows, and then the parties to the covenant walked through the pieces. If both parties had something to fulfil, they both walked between the pieces. If only one party had something to fulfil, then only that party walked between the pieces. What is a one-party covenant? Generally in our land, a will is a one-party covenant. We don't call them 'covenants', we call them testaments—last will and testament. In Greek, the word *diathéké* is used in both senses, of a covenant and will, for a will is a one-party covenant.

A one-party covenant

Your Uncle Samuel in America dies and you get summoned to the solicitor. He reads out the will of the aforesaid uncle with all the details. His stocks and shares, his ranch, his three helicopters, private jet and four ocean-going yachts—and he has left it all to you. You say to the solicitor,

'What have I got to do for it?'

'Nothing.'

'You mean to say he's just left it like that?'

'Yes, he's left it to you.'

'On what conditions?'

'He hasn't put any conditions in.'

'You mean to say I can get the lot?'

'Yes.'

'How can I be sure?'

'Well it's in the will. It's signed and sealed and settled and witnessed by witnesses. It's a one-party covenant. You haven't anything to fulfil. If you want it, all you have to do is to take it.'

In Jeremiah 34, we read that the Israelites made a covenant with God under which they would let their Hebrew slaves go free. Having let them go free, they clawed them back again, contrary to the covenant they had made. It was a one-party covenant: God had no conditions to fulfil. It was the men of Judea that made the covenant and bound themselves by it to let the slaves go free. Look how the thing is expressed. 'And the men who transgressed my covenant and did not keep the terms of the covenant that they made before me, I will make them like the calf that they cut in two and passed between its parts' (Jer 34:18). That is, these men of Judea passed between the parts. Thus they made the covenant. God didn't pass between the parts. He had nothing to fulfil. That was just these fellows making a covenant that bound them, before God, to let their slaves go free. So in making the covenant, they put the pieces of the sacrifice in two rows, this time it was a calf, and they walked between the pieces, thus signing and sealing the covenant that they made. That was a one-party covenant. They were the only ones that had anything to fulfil.

The Sinai covenant

Let's look at the law and the covenant made on Sinai just for the moment and see what kind of a covenant that was. This is the covenant of the law of Moses, commonly called the old

covenant to contrast it with the new covenant that Christ has made for us. This is Exodus 24, and the actual making of the covenant. Now watch what happens.

Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the rules. And all the people answered with one voice and said, 'All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do.' And Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD. He rose early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the LORD. And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he threw against the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, 'All that the LORD has spoken will we do, and we will be obedient.' And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, 'Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.' (vv. 3–8)

So here was the covenant they made. What did they get out of it? On God's side, it said,

Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel. (Exod 19:5)

So these great blessings were offered to Israel on condition that they kept the covenant. And the covenant being proposed to them and the terms attached, Moses recited the terms orally and they said, 'Yes, all that the Lord says, we will do.' Then Moses had the wisdom to write it in a book so that thereafter nobody could say they didn't understand and they didn't realize that was involved. He wrote all the words in the book and read it out of the book and they replied again, 'All that the Lord has spoken, we will do.' So they offered the sacrifices and sprinkled the blood. It was a two-party covenant. God saying, 'I'll bless you on these terms, if you on your part, keep the terms of the covenant.'

Hebrews 8 in the New Testament tells us what happened.

But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second. For he finds fault with them when he says, 'Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. (vv. 6–9)

What was wrong with the first covenant? Why was it unsatisfactory? Why will God change it? Well this in particular: 'For they did not continue in my covenant'. That was its weakness. They didn't keep the terms. The people didn't continue in it, and we know all the reasons. Because of their weakness and sinfulness and everything else, they couldn't persist

in keeping the terms of the covenant and they didn't. That ruined the covenant, so there has to be a new covenant.

The new covenant

What kind of a covenant is the new covenant? Well, here are the terms written down in Jeremiah 31:33–34:

This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts.

That's what God will do. And second,

I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Again, that's what God will do.

No longer shall each one teach his neighbour and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD', for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.

That is, all will have direct and personal knowledge of God and won't need to come to or through a priest or a prophet. And fourthly,

I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

These are the terms of the new covenant. What have they got to do? All the terms are about what God will do. The new covenant is a one-party covenant, which is why we call it a testament. And the second half of the Bible, the Christian bit, is called in Greek the new *diathéké*, and *diathéké* is the word for covenant and for testament. It is the New Testament. And when our Lord at the Lord's Supper took the cup and handed it to the apostles, he said, 'This cup . . . is the new covenant in my blood' (Luke 22:20). So the new covenant is a one-party covenant, as distinct from the law, which was a two-party covenant, and therein is the difference.

The two-party covenant had this weakness that the Israelites couldn't keep the terms and they didn't persist in it. The new covenant is precisely different in that particular, and what is more, look at Hebrews 7:20: 'And it was not without an oath. For those who formerly became priests were made such without an oath,' (that is, Jewish priests were made priests without an oath, there was no oath in the ceremony) 'but this one was made a priest with an oath by the one who said to him: "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, 'You are a priest for ever'"' after the order of Melchizedek. See the superiority of Christ's priesthood. He was made priest and in the ceremony, God swore this oath. From that the writer deduces this: 'This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant' (v. 22). Note that he is not only the mediator who set the covenant up, but the guarantor of it.

I do like that bit. All those great promises that God has made, 'I will write my laws on their hearts; their sin and iniquity I will remember no more' and, 'I will give myself to your

people so that all can know me direct'—who guarantees it shall be done? Christ is the guarantor. I go to the bank manager and say,

'I have a business scheme. I'm going to buy fifty acres. I can buy this at a good price and I've got the planning permission to put up a whole range of super-duper houses; and I'd like you to put up the money.'

'How much is it going to cost?'

'One hundred and fifty million pounds.'

'Can you offer me any security that you will do this, that you'll put up the houses and that it will be a success?'

'You stand to make a lot of profit out of it, bank manager. It's a good scheme, copper bottom.'

'Yes, but I want some security. What security have you got?'

'I've got a little cash.'

'How much?'

'My grannie gave me one hundred and fifty pounds at Christmas.'

'I'm sorry, that isn't security enough. Have you got any collateral?'

'I don't know what you mean.'

'Well, have you got a skyscraper or two that, if the worst comes to the worst, you could sell?'

'No, I haven't got any collateral.'

'Well, sorry, we can't proceed. You'll have to get someone then to come and guarantee you. Do you know a wealthy businessman that's prepared to go guarantor that your scheme will be fulfilled?'

So it is with the new covenant. Who goes guarantor that it should be fulfilled? Jesus is the guarantor of this new better covenant—magnificent, isn't it! So we've established the difference between a two-party covenant, like the one at Sinai; and a one-party covenant, like the men of Jeremiah's day, or our blessed Lord in his new covenant.

The new covenant—for whom?

AUDIENCE: With that new covenant, where it says that it's with the house of Israel, I assume that that would be the church from that expression used.

DWG: No, when Jeremiah said it would be made with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, he meant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. Now it has been enacted, not it *will* be, it *has* been: when Christ died, the new covenant was enacted. Covenants in the Bible are enacted when the sacrifice is made. The new covenant was enacted when the great covenant sacrifice was made at Calvary. It was made with Israel and Judah. How do we come into it? Well Ephesians will tell us that we Gentiles, called the uncircumcision by that which is called circumcision, in those days were not only children of wrath and disobedient, but were aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise. But we're not that anymore—we're no longer strangers from the covenants of promise. We have a part in them, because Christ has preached peace to those that were near,

that is the Jew, and those that were far-off; and he has taken out folks from each group and joined them together to make one. So that in Christ, we inherit likewise, as the Jew did, all those covenants of promise.

The covenant with Abraham

But now to go back to the particular covenant that Paul is speaking about in Galatians—the covenant made with Abraham in Genesis 15—just have a look at that to see what it says when God made his promise to Abraham.

And he brought him outside and said, ‘Look towards heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.’ Then he said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be.’ And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness. (Gen 15:5–6)

Abraham was justified then, but now look what happened next:

And he said to him, ‘I am the LORD who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess.’ (15:7)

And Abraham, being a real believer, said, ‘Thank you very much, Lord, but how shall I know that I will possess it?’ (v. 8, own trans.). I like Abraham for that, don’t you? He didn’t let it wash over his head as some vague, nice-sounding thing that didn’t mean a lot. Here was a promise of inheritance and Abraham wanted to know how and on what grounds he could be absolutely sure that he would possess it. And God’s answer was this covenant sacrifice, ‘Bring me a heifer,’ and so on, ‘and cut it in pieces.’ So there’s going to be a covenant sacrifice and the victims were cut in pieces and laid in two rows and now God states the basis of the covenant.

Then the LORD said to Abram, ‘Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgement on the nation that they serve, and afterwards they shall come out with great possessions. As for yourself, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.’ . . . On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, ‘To your offspring I give this land’. (Gen 15:13–16, 18)

And God now specifies the extent of it. Abraham, how will you know that you will inherit it? Because of the covenant that is now made, that’s how you’ll know—the inheritance is secured by a covenant.

But now we need to be lawyers. The sacrificial victims were cut in pieces. Who walked between the pieces? Did Abraham walk between the pieces, did God walk between the pieces, or did both of them walk between the pieces? We have to discover whether it’s a one-party covenant or a two-party covenant. If it’s a two-party covenant, both must walk between the pieces. If it’s a one-party covenant, only one has to walk and the one that walks

is the one that has the conditions to fulfil. How many walked? One, according to this man over here. All agreed?

AUDIENCE: It's described as a flaming torch and a smoking fire pot which passed between the pieces.

DWG: The flaming torch wasn't a symbol of Abraham, was it? What was Abraham doing? Well he laid the pieces in two rows. Birds of prey came down on the carcasses and Abraham drove them away, waiting now for the ceremony. It wasn't enough just for the animals to be sacrificed. A person, or persons, had to walk between the pieces. Abraham didn't walk, because look what happened—'deep sleep fell on [him]' (v. 12), so he didn't walk. Did he see himself walking in the vision? No. 'When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking firepot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces' (v. 17). Not Abraham. It was a one-party covenant. Shout 'hallelujah', ladies and gentlemen!

Now then, come back to Galatians 3. It's a legal argument, but thank God for God's sense of legality in legal things! He wants not only to give you an inheritance, but to tie it up legally. So if you ask God, like Abraham had the sense to ask him, 'How shall I know I shall possess it?' this is how God has responded—by giving the covenant. So it says, 'even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified' (v. 15). And verse 17 adds, 'the law, which came 430 years afterwards, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void.' God made the covenant with Abraham with no mention of the law at all, or its conditions, and the thing was signed, sealed and settled. You can't take the law, given four hundred and thirty years afterwards, and add it as a condition that has to be fulfilled. That wouldn't be allowed in our law, or in any law. The keeping of the law then has nothing to do with the fulfilment of this particular covenant. That is Paul's argument.

Beneficiaries – Abraham's offspring

There is another dimension—how do we get into it then? Once a covenant has been confirmed, 'no one annuls it or adds to it'. So now you have a problem, for the promises were given to Abraham and to his offspring. And the offspring is Christ. In the covenant document, this inheritance isn't given just to anybody: it's given to Abraham and to his offspring. You can't add any names to it.

Your Aunt Fanny dies and leaves her will; and you go with the rest of the family to hear the will read after the funeral. The house goes to George, the car goes to Elizabeth, the pearl necklace goes to Sandra, the furniture goes to Bill, and that's that. And the solicitor comes to the end and you say,

'Please, read on.'

'There's nothing more.'

'There must be.'

'Why?'

'My name is Alexander. What has she left me?'

'I'm sorry, there's nothing about Alexander in here.'

'There must be, because I know my aunt loved me as well as she loved them.'

'Well, sorry, there isn't.'

'Well you'll have to put my name in then.'

'I can't,' says the solicitor.

You can't add it afterwards, and I'm afraid the inheritance is promised to Abraham and his offspring. You can't add your name in. So what now then? Well the answer is given at the end of the chapter.

For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (3:26–28)

And if you are Christ's, if you are of Christ, if you've been baptised into Christ, if you have put on Christ like a man would put on a big robe that covered him from head to foot, you are *in* Christ. And as for the inheritance promised to Christ,

Then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. (3:29)

If you're in Christ, everything that comes to Christ comes to you. Marvellous, isn't it? Then the question is, how did you get into Christ? And of course, the answer is everywhere, and you see it throughout this epistle and throughout the New Testament: it's not by keeping the works of the law that you get into Christ, but simply through repentance and faith. You ought to be dancing for joy actually. The next bit I'm going to tell you is tremendous. You mustn't add anything to a covenant once it's signed, sealed and settled, but suppose we come back to the other illustration. You've had this house built, and you have paid the builder the agreed price. Then, when you go to take possession of the house, you find further up the estate he's built you a hunting lodge and a boat marina and various other things as well. And you say, 'What are you doing? I'm not prepared to pay you for that.' He says, 'I don't want you to. I thought I'd just like to do it, just out of the goodness of my heart. A big house like this has to have those things anyway, so I thought I'd just add them in.' Well that would be lovely, wouldn't it?

Now God promised to give Abraham and his offspring this inheritance of some few thousand acres in the Middle East. You say, 'Well if that's what it means, I'm not interested in that. I belong to the church and in the church we're very spiritually minded and my inheritance is in heaven.' Aren't you really interested? Do you think Christ is interested in the world? He's been crucified and slung out of it. Has he said, 'Well I don't want it anyway'? Or is Christ going to inherit the earth? Listen to God's promise to Messiah: 'Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession' (Ps 2:8). 'Jesus shall reign where'er the sun'⁷, and if Christ is going to inherit it, I want to inherit it with him! There's no shame in that. If he claims the Middle East, should he claim the whole world? Well, just have a look at Romans, where Paul, with his same technique, is arguing that justification is by faith and not by the works of the law, and to reinforce that argument he says:

⁷ Isaac Watts (1674-1748).

For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be heirs, faith is made null and the promise is void. For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law, there is no transgression. That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all. (Rom 4:13–16)

What magnificent words they are. Here's God adding to the original benefits. He doesn't add any further conditions, but adds to the benefits—'heir of the world'. 'And do you know why it is by faith and not by the law?' says Paul. 'It is so that this promise, this glorious promise of inheritance, might be absolutely sure to all the offspring.' Amen and amen.

This business of the covenant, therefore, is exceedingly important—it's tied down legally. It isn't just an odd curious argument that we can afford to neglect. It goes throughout the New Testament. This whole idea of inheritance is one of the major concepts of the New Testament and, ladies and gentlemen, of course it's nothing that we can forget. That central ceremony by which we remember our Lord at his request, is a covenant: 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood'. The new covenant. So this is one of the major things of Christianity and, sooner or later, it should come out in our teaching. The glorious business of trying to convince believers that they are endlessly more wealthy than they think they are, and the terms upon which it is given and the way God has been careful to tie it down legally, and why that is deliberate. 'It is not of law, but of grace through faith'. Why? God wants it to be guaranteed to all the offspring.

Magnificent stuff, isn't it? And you can think of Paul's frustration at those that want to take believers back under the law. He's not going to see believers robbed of their assurance and of their enjoyment of the promise and the glory of the inheritance. He's not going to see that filched away from them by putting them back under the law, for the law cannot give you assurance of the inheritance.

The purpose of the law

But now notice the development of the argument. If he's proved that the inheritance, and thus the promises and the blessings, are not by the law, watch how he next moves in the course of his argument. 'Why then the law?' (Gal 3:19). Now there's the mark of a very skilful, mature and experienced controversialist. He has proved that justification and the inheritance are not by the law. Now what will his opponents say? 'Paul, I can't say anything about this inheritance, but this I can say, and there's no doubt. God did give the law, didn't he? You're not saying that Sinai was for no purpose. You say the inheritance is not of the law. I don't understand that, but it doesn't alter the fact that the law was given. It's no good your saying that we're not under it: God gave the law and meant it to be kept, didn't he?'

What would you say to that? Paul has got to have an answer to that. It's not enough for him to take one set of Scriptures that say the inheritance is not of the law, if he can't answer the other set: why on earth did God give the law then? You have to answer both and if you are really concerned to get the truth of God's word, you can't just fasten on one passage and

leave all the others, in order to establish your case. We do believe in the lot. We're not content to establish a case by forgetting half the Bible. So you've got to turn around and answer the question, why then was the law given? And here Paul expounds the purpose of the law.

Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary. Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one. Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. (3:19–22)

The law could never bring you righteousness, but it had a very positive function. It was there to convict you of sin. Why do you have to convict people of sin? Well until they're convicted of their sin, until they see that they cannot earn salvation by keeping the law, because the law itself proves to them they're sinners, until they come there, they're not likely to believe, are they?

So the law is given out of the kindness of God's heart, to show people how desperately sick they are, how guilty, how liable to God's wrath—so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to them who believe. That's why the law was given. I use the crude illustration of a thermometer. We all know what thermometers are: they're given to take your temperature if you feel a bit groggy. So the dear lady, she's feeling very groggy when her husband goes off to work on Monday, and when he comes home she's really looking terrible, and the next morning she can scarce get out of bed. So he says, 'My dear, I'll call the doctor.' 'No, no, you're not going to call a doctor. I'm not as bad as you say.' So he goes and has a word with the doctor, and the doctor turns up and he gets out his thermometer and then he reads the thing. 'You've got a temperature of 40°C. You'd better go to bed. If you go on like this, you'll be dead.' Do you see from the thermometer how ill the dear lady is? And the law's like a thermometer: it's given to show us how bad we are.

Suppose you come to me one day and I'm in bed with a scarf round my neck, and you say, 'What's wrong with you?'

'I'm ill.'

'Yes, I know you're ill, but what are you doing sucking that thermometer?'

'Don't be so daft. I'm ill.'

'But what are you sucking the thermometer for?'

'The doctor took my temperature and says that unless I can get my temperature down to an ordinary, normal level, this is very dangerous, so I'm doing my best to get the temperature down by sucking this thermometer.'

'Well, Gooding, you are ill. You're more ill than you thought you were!'

The thermometer is there to show you how ill you are, but you don't get better by sucking it. To get better, you'll need something absolutely different. God's law is given to shut up all under sin, to show us how bad we are, to drive us to the Saviour that we might

be saved, be justified and made inheritors of the kingdom of heaven through faith in Christ. That's what the law is for.

Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. (Rom 3:19)

And now Paul uses an analogy. Notice the second use of analogy. This time it is on how to educate and bring up children.

Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified through faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. (Gal 3:23–26)

I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God. (Gal 4:1–7)

Religion doesn't lead to sanctification. The law doesn't sanctify. It is a personal relationship with Christ and being indwelt by his Spirit that sanctifies us and they who, with strong religious determination, preach the law and circumcision and things like that for salvation, they don't keep the law themselves, says Paul. But notice that that argument from the motives and behaviour of the false teachers is the very last argument he uses. It may be an argument that sometimes we shall be obliged to make, but it isn't the first argument you would make—to question the motives of those that hold the other view.

Conclusion

So that's dear old Paul, now gone to glory these many years, showing us how we should argue. We owe him a tremendous debt of gratitude. He's the man that stood, with all the unpopularity that involved, not only outside the church but, I'm afraid, very often inside the churches, standing for the gospel and standing for our freedom, wanting to see us standing upright, facing the world, facing eternity with joy in our hearts and with confidence as heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, no longer slaves, but God's freeborn men and women.

1 John

Structure and Major Themes

This is our last occasion together for the time being this week, so allow me to say how much I have enjoyed it. It has been an enriching experience to get to know you and I trust the friendship begun will continue throughout the years. Let me just say what I have been trying to do this week, lest it may not have become clear to you. In our selection of topics, we aimed to take two Gospels, two rather different Gospels, and to notice some of their features that would help us to see some of the topics that the Gospel writers are discussing by the way in which they select and then arrange their material. And we thought then to investigate two epistles, two very different epistles, and do the same with them—not to exhaust all their detail, but to see some of their dominant themes. Mention was made also that if we were able to do that, we might end up looking at the book of the Revelation and its literary structure, and how that might help us to go about understanding it. But as usual, time has defeated us and our interest that grew out of our studies led us elsewhere. So we shall have to content ourselves today with looking at the second of our epistles, which I have chosen to be the first Epistle of John.

In addition this week, we set ourselves to look at three of the great strands in the biblical doctrine of salvation, so we looked at Peter's emphasis on the salvation of the soul. We noticed that he, more than any other New Testament epistle writer, concentrates on the soul. While the other writers do mention it, it's Peter proportionately that mentions it more than any other; and we traced back the cause of that interest on Peter's part in the salvation of the soul, to that vivid and somewhat uncomfortable experience he had when he rebuked the Lord and said, 'This be far from you, Lord. You're not going to suffer. You're not going to be crucified. You're going to be a great success actually, so get those negative ideas out of your head' (Matt 16:22, own trans.). And our Lord had to turn and rebuke him and, on that occasion, taught Peter the doctrine of the salvation of the soul: 'He that loves his soul shall lose it. He that loses his soul for my sake shall keep it' (v. 25, own trans.).

Understandably, therefore, Peter in his Epistle is very interested in the matter of the salvation of the soul. Then we noticed the emphasis that one encounters with Paul in his Epistles, the question of justification by faith without works, but how that also leads on to deliverance from the power of sin. Justification then, and sanctification. We noticed also that the Gospel of John and the Epistles of John for their part emphasize more than any others that side of salvation which is denoted by the expression *eternal life* and the related doctrine of regeneration.

So yesterday, we were looking at one of Paul's Epistles that concentrates on justification. Now today, if we take one of John's Epistles, we shall see that, like his Gospel, it is concerned with eternal life. The first Epistle of John is a very well loved epistle of course. It contains some very famous phrases that have become favourite verses with the people of God all down the generations—verses such as 'The blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin' (1:7). Or again, 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness' (1:9). There's the delightful outburst of praise in 3:1: 'See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God'; and that gem of an expression from 4:18: 'perfect love casts out fear'. So it is an epistle that has ministered tremendous comfort and encouragement to God's people all down the ages. We shall not get time to investigate all its details, of course.

The difficulty that many people feel with this epistle is that, if you look at the detail, it contains a lot of repetition and, worse than that, on occasions it seems to be going round in circles, coming back to the same thing time and time again. That has been the despair of those who are given to analysis, to make any sense of the structure of this epistle. Some people have suggested that this was because John, when he wrote it, had now become old and, as preachers do sometimes, like some before you, although they once were very clear and precise, they can get old and doddery and keep going round in circles, saying the same thing and not really advancing matters very far! And so they suggested that this repetition in the Epistle of John is because he was by now old and doddery, poor old boy. Others, with a higher view of inspiration and the apostle, have suggested that it is not going round in circles, getting nowhere, but it is going round in circles in the manner of a spiral. That every time it goes round, it gets a bit higher and that John, in developing his theme of love and light, though he repeats himself, each time he's taking us a stage higher.

A preliminary overview

So my first task today is not, as I say, to try and expound all the details or to solve all the knotty problems, but is to contribute my little part in helping us to get our fingers round the epistle, to grasp it in that sense, to get it in our minds as a whole, and to see how the various parts are related to each other. So that when we preach it, we shan't be going round in circles, but shall see the point of the way John has arranged his material, because the arrangement is part of the theme or themes that he wishes to get across. So let's do a little preliminary investigation ourselves. If we can open our Bibles to 1 John 1 and notice how it begins:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete. (vv. 1–4)

With that introduction, John now goes on to share with his readers the chief message that has been brought to them by this great manifestation, that God is light and in him is no darkness at all. If therefore we're going to have fellowship with him, then certain conditions must be fulfilled. And then, if indeed we are having fellowship with God, it will become evident—there will be evidences that we are thus in fellowship with God.

And then from 2:12 onwards, he exhorts us not to love the world and tells us why we shouldn't. And from that he comes to a longish paragraph in which he warns us about false christs.

Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us. But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge. I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth. Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also. (2:18–23)

And from that warning, he proceeds to encourage and exhort his fellow believers that they should not be deceived by the false teachings of these antichrists, but stay firm and abide in that doctrine which they heard from the beginning. And that exhortation goes down to the end of the chapter.

Notice how chapter 3 then begins, for we are merely taking a bird's eye view and, so to speak, having a look at the terrain from above at the moment.

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has it not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. (3:1–3)

So here is the hope that when the Lord Jesus appears, we shall be like him. And if we have that hope, we purify ourselves and, accordingly, we shall seek now, so to purify ourselves that now we are like him. And what is he like? Says John,

Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practises righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. (3:7–8)

As we pass by, we notice that we have recurred to this theme of something appearing or being made manifest. In chapter 1, it was that eternal life that was with the Father and has been made manifest to us, and John writes so that we might have fellowship with God in this great eternal life which has been manifested. Now, at the beginning of chapter 3, we

recur to the idea of manifestation—the future manifestation of Christ, ‘we know that when he appears we shall be like him’. That is his future manifestation, when he comes again, when we see him, we shall see him as he is and be transformed into his image. But in addition, in verse 8, there is the manifestation of the Son of God in his incarnation and his life on earth, by which we learnt what the Son of God is like. And if we would be like him when he comes again, we must start being like him as he was when he was manifested the first time. So then there follow exhortations and teachings in the verses that follow.

Notice however, that in chapter 4 we recur to the theme, this time not of false christs and antichrists, but false spirits.

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error. (4:1–6)

And now of course, our memories are beginning to observe a little bit of a recurring pattern, are they not? We heard about the warnings of false christs at the end of chapter 2 and now, here, the warning about false spirits. That being said, look what subject now catches John as he moves on in his letter.

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. (4:7–9)

And now we recur again to this theme of something being manifested. In chapter 1, it was that eternal life which was with the Father that has been manifested. At the beginning of chapter 3, it was the Son of God, manifested at his coming again: ‘He shall be manifested’ (v. 2, RV); but manifested in the centuries past at his incarnation. Now it is not so much the life of God, or the Son of God, but the love of God that is manifested. There are no prizes given out to reward you for guessing how this section is going to end. We have been warned in chapter 2 about false christs; we have been warned in chapter 4 about false spirits; the epistle will end with a warning against false gods, or idols.

And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols. (5:20–21)

A possible structure

That is one way of looking at some of the main elements in John's letter. I am not offering it as some dogmatic statement of absolute truth. All I'm looking for is a scaffolding, so to speak, that may help us to get a view of the thing as a whole, and how the parts fit together and what are some of its dominant themes. To help us get those ideas before us, I have set them out in this little table.

Fig 2

	1	2	3
(from)	The manifestation of the life eternal (1:1-4)	The manifestation of the Son of God and of the children of God (2:28-3:10)	The manifestation of the love of God in his Son and in his people (4:7-11)
	<i>The world and its attractiveness—'love not'</i>	<i>The world and its hatred—'fear not'</i>	<i>The world and its opposition—'overcome'</i>
(to)	The warning against antichrists who deny that Jesus is the Christ (2:18-27)	The warning against believing the spirit of falsehood as distinct from the spirit of truth (4:1-6)	The warning against putting idols in place of the true God (5:18-21)

The table starts where the epistle starts, with its account of the manifestation of the life of God and following that down, in the first column to the end of chapter 2, the warning against false christs. Noticing that after the warning against false christs, immediately comes the mention of the manifestation (appearing) of the son of God and of the children of God: 'What we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him' (3:2). Then following that down in column two until the warning against false spirits in chapter 4, noticing again that immediately after that warning about false spirits, the very next topic that is broached is the manifestation of the love of God. And then following that down to the end of the epistle, which we've just found to be a warning against false gods.

You may not find this kind of analysis very helpful but what I'm trying to do is to outline the major themes so that we have them in front of us, allowing us to compare, for instance, those topics of manifestation. Yes, they do repeat themselves, as some say, but it's not because John is old and dodderly. They all talk about manifestation, but the topic each time is different. It's the manifestation of the life of God to start with. Then it's the manifestation of the Son of God and of the children of God and, finally, it's the manifestation of the love of God.

While the question of the love of God is mentioned all over the place, notice how each time it is different. And then similarly, in the warnings against false teaching, notice how,

while those warnings have things in common, it's not that John is just repeating himself. The first is the warning against false christs, the second is the warning against false spirits and the third is the warning against false gods. That immediately will help us when we come to grasp the significance of the detail, and will stop us getting dodderly and all mixed up—hopefully!—and help us to expound particular verses in their own appropriate context and see the flow of the argument. So then we shall be able to apply the details on the right argument flow and be more effective, both in our understanding and our preaching.

'The world'

In this little table, I've also pointed out that in the middle of the three passages, John talks about the world. Now this matter of the world is mentioned by other writers both in the Gospels and the epistles. But, as will be evident if you look in any good concordance, it is a topic found very especially in John. John is the chap that's interested, for some reason or other, in the world and what our attitude should be to the world. You will notice that the topic of the world is treated in all these three passages, but once more the emphasis is different in each. In chapter 2, the exhortation is:

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world. (2:15–16)

So in that first passage, the world is represented as something so attractive that, if we're not careful, it will attract our hearts and will attract our love: the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride of life and all the beautiful things. And you say, 'What's wrong with all those beautiful things? Why shouldn't you love the world? Even if you don't love ice-cream, why can't you love art?' Is that what it's talking about? What does 'the world' mean? Whatever it means, it is something that we're not to love, and the reason why we're not to love it, is because if we do, it will drag our love away from the Father.

It will be very important that we should get a right idea of what the world is. Folks have had different ideas about this down the centuries. In my youth, when the good teachers started to denounce the world, they paid inordinate attention to the colour of women's stockings! It may seem strange to you who are so young, but in my infancy, all women wore thick black stockings—some of them were brown, but mostly black—but with the rolling on of the ages, eventually there began to appear these sort of transparent, yellowy stockings: I don't know what you'd call them. When these first appeared in church, the elders looked upon this with great horror. This was worldliness invading the church: nothing ever had been seen like it before! Well, after a while, all women wore this new kind of see-through stocking for the simple reason that the manufacturers didn't make black stockings anymore. Everybody wore them, so that became the accepted thing, worldly or not. I remember the Sunday, because I lived in a country town, when a bright young thing came down from London and people were startled because she wore black stockings. Everybody thought this was colossally worldly. Curious, isn't it? So you can't define 'worldly' by the colour of women's stockings!

What is worldliness then? If we're going to offer practical exhortation to ourselves first, and then to young folks, we need to be clear. Some have thought that art and literature are worldly, and music is worldly, so they won't allow themselves that. Dear old Calvin had everybody dressing up in very dark colours. None of this frivolity that had gone on before, and you were brought before the church elders if you didn't dress the right way and if you were in any way frivolous in your behaviour. We notice that John isn't just going on and on denouncing worldliness. He's going to describe it, if not define it, and he's very careful in his three passages. In the first, he points out the world as something that would attract our love and draw our love away from the Father. In the second passage, he warns us about the world and its hatred (3:13). 'Do not be surprised,' said the Lord Jesus before he left his apostles, 'if the world hates you. Remember it hated me before it hated you' (John 15:18, own trans.). Are we going to get a persecution complex? Surely not. Our Lord didn't have any persecution complex, but he did point out to his apostles the reality of the world's hatred: where it stems from and what it is.

Finally in the third great portion, he talks about the world as that which makes it very difficult for a believer to keep the commandments of God.

By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. (5:2-3)

Why are his commandments not a heavy, difficult burden? Because 'everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world' (5:4). You see the flow of the thought. If a man or a woman is genuinely born of God, they have within them the power that lifts them above and overcomes the world, and that is what makes the keeping of the commandments of the Lord not a burdensome thing.

The world will make it a very big burden at an exceedingly practical level, because the world isn't organized to encourage folks to obey the commandments of God. In Spain, it used to be that so many people cheated on their income tax that the government put the tax rate far higher than it needed to be, because nobody paid it at that higher rate. But the Christians, because they didn't want to cheat, got punished with an enormous rate of income tax. When a friend of mine there went to see the income tax inspector, the inspector half-coughed and said, 'Most people cheat, so we have to have it at this rate, but you don't really need to pay it at this rate if you would cheat like the rest.' So what should you do? The world isn't always directly hostile to the people of God, but it just isn't geared to the keeping of the commandments of God. If you try to keep the commandments of God, you can find the world's organization and the way it's run is a very big obstacle. But these commandments are not grievous: 'For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world.'

So I offer you this outline as a working tool for investigating the epistle. At least it will demonstrate its major themes—repeated yes, but not just repeated. When they are repeated, they are giving you a different aspect of the topic each time, whether it be the manifestation of the life of God, the manifestation of the Son of God, or the manifestation of the love of God. Whether it be warning about the world and its attractiveness: don't love it; a warning

about the world and its hatred: don't be frightened by it; or a warning about the world and the burden it will place upon you if you try to keep the commandments of God, and how to overcome it. And finally, the warning against false christs, but then the warning against false spirits and then again, the warning against false gods. You'd get the impression that John is Trinitarian!

John's purposes in writing

Another helpful way of coming at the epistle would be to notice the explicit purposes that John had in writing. Many have found it very helpful to notice in John's Gospel, his statement about the miracles. 'These [signs] are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name' (John 20:31). Many an evangelist has started off a sermon that way round, that John wrote these things for this reason, first to convince you that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. That's the first step—coming to believe who he is—and secondly, believing in him that you might have life in his name. If we look at the epistle and ask John why he has written it, he gives us several purposes that he has in mind.

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life. (5:13)

So if John's Gospel was written that we might believe and receive eternal life, this epistle is written that we may not only have eternal life, but know we have it. This was brought home to me very vividly by the late Sir J. N. D. Anderson, when he came as a young man to the college I was at, to lead some of the Bible readings. He explained how you may know that you have eternal life and he went through the argument. I found it a tremendous help, and it's been with me ever since. From a practical point of view that's important. We preach in the gospel that people can come to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and have eternal life. But there are many believers who aren't quite sure they have it, or how they can know they've got it. And here is John, with a pastor's heart, writing 'this is how you know you have eternal life.' God wants us to know it.

But John, as he writes, also has several other purposes in mind, and we see them from a common phrase in his letter 'these things I have written so that . . .', or some similar expression. 'That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us' (1:3). Here's the purpose clause, 'we proclaim it to you so that you too may have fellowship with us, with the Father and with his Son. We write so that our joy may be complete' (vv. 3–4).

Or, 'My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin' (2:1). His goal is holiness. 'I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you' (2:26)—to stop you being led astray and save you from deception. Then there is the series in the middle of chapter 2, verses 12–14 and so forth: 'I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake. I am writing to you, fathers . . . I am writing to you, young men . . .' and so forth. Writing, and giving the reason why he has

written. Not the purpose, but the reason and then, as we've just seen, he says, 'I've written these things so that you might have assurance of the possession of eternal life.'

The three tests

There is another very helpful observation about the first Epistle of John, which you will find in Robert Law's famous book, *The Tests of Life*.⁸ Most expositors who have written after him contain either his idea, or modifications of it. Robert Law points out that John offers us certain tests, which he repeats in each of the main sections of his letter—see Fig 3.

Fig 3

The Three Tests

1. First Cycle	1:5–2:28	The Christian life as fellowship with God (walking in the light), tested by right behaviour (1:8–2:6), love (2:7–17), and correct doctrine (2:18–28).
2. Second Cycle	2:29–4:6	Divine sonship tested by right behaviour (2:29–3:10), love (3:10–23), and correct doctrine (3:24–4:6).
3. Third Cycle	4:7–5:21	Closer correlation of behaviour, love and doctrine.

Testing the claim of 'fellowship'

First comes the claim that we know God and have fellowship with him.

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practise the truth. (1:5–6)

So the claim to have fellowship with God must be tested, and John applies three tests. The first is the test of right behaviour.

By this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says, 'I know him' but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him. (2:3–4)

So that is the test of right behaviour, and it goes through to verse 6. Secondly, there is the test of true love.

Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that you have heard. At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. (2:7–9)

⁸ Robert Law, *The Tests of Life*, originally published 1909.

He can say what he likes. If he doesn't love his brother, then whatever he says of having fellowship with God and being in the light is not true. The test of love has found him out as being false. Then in verses 18–29 there is yet a further test, the test of correct doctrine—the doctrine of Christ. To demonstrate that you are genuine—really know God and have fellowship with God—you must be able to pass all three tests. It isn't enough just to pass one. For instance, you can find a man who is scrupulously just in his business, and you say, 'He bears every mark of being a true Christian' but then you find he's a Unitarian and denies the deity of Christ. He passes the test of right behaviour but he doesn't pass the test of correct doctrine.

Here's a man who's scrupulously just in his business and he's absolutely impeccable when it comes to the Christian creed and believes in the doctrine of Christ, but he's a thoroughly curmudgeonly individual, cruel to his family and to his wife, and the cause of bitter strife in the church—obviously showing signs of hatred of his fellow believers. Sorry, it's not enough to pass two tests out of three. You must pass all three tests, says John—the test of right behaviour, the test of true love and the test of correct doctrine.

Testing the claim of sonship

In the next great section of the book, we see the profession of being a child of God. 'We are God's children now' (3:2)—not simply that we have fellowship with God, but that we are children of God. That claim too must be tested and the three tests are repeated. The first test is right behaviour.

And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practises lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practises righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil. (3:3–8)

In this, the children of God are manifest. There is a sense in which verse 2 can say 'Beloved, we are God's children now' but it is not yet made obvious. You can't necessarily tell and the world can't necessarily see, and that is not surprising. When the Lord Jesus was here, the world didn't know him either, and crucified him as a blasphemer. They got that horribly wrong. In spite of his sinless life—righteous and holy and loving—the world decided that he was a blasphemer and an imposter and crucified him. If they thus interpreted Christ wrongly, it's not to be wondered at if they won't always recognize a true believer, and it's not made manifest yet what we shall be. It waits until the coming of Christ. The other side of it is that, in another sense, it is very clear who God's children are and who are not. 'By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil' (3:10).

If I give profession of being a child of God, the test I must first apply to myself is the test of right behaviour, and then of course, from 3:11 onward: 'This is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another'—the test of true love. Cain

hated his brother Abel, but then Cain was not a child of God, and John will be very severe here on us, 'Whoever does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer' (3:14–15). And then, as we saw in our first run through, at the end of that paragraph there comes the test of correct doctrine once more. 'Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits' (4:1)—the test of true doctrine. All three tests must be passed. It's no good to have just one or two: you need all three.

Similarly in the last section, and I needn't go through the detail: divine love and life, shown once more in the love, then the obedience and then the faith of God's children. You will see there that I've wandered from the track a little bit. And some commentators would say that in that third and last section you still have the same order: the test is right behaviour, true love and correct doctrine. Well maybe. They have to push it a little bit. It is better not to push it than to be artificial. Divine love and life shown once more, however, in three respects—the love of God's children, the obedience of God's children and the faith of God's children.

In other words, if we profess to be in the enjoyment of the love of God, then notice how that profession must be tested. If we say, 'I love God, but I don't love my brother,' well I'm deceiving myself, for if I don't love my brother whom I have seen, how can I say I love God, whom I've not seen? And anyway, if you love the Father, you'll love the child, won't you? If you really love the Father and his child is a very awkward cuss, yet for the Father's sake you'll love him, won't you?

What is love? We need to test what love is. Loving God means keeping his commandments. What does it mean to love my brother? Well loving my brother means that if I love God and keep God's commandments, it is not love to my brother to compromise God's commandments just to make him feel good. That isn't loving my brother. So that profession to have the love of God and to love God, that too needs to be tested.

That was meant to be a little bird's eye view of the contents of the epistle!

Discussion

AUDIENCE: Can I ask you just how that all fits in with the notion of failure within the Christian life?

DWG: That's a very good question to ask, and the question is all the more strong and insistent because John uses such extreme terms—'Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil' (3:8). We have all been perturbed by it, and some are very perturbed. Says somebody, 'I find I sin a particular sin and I confess it to the Lord, but then I keep doing it and I do it again, and I fall again, and then I confess it and I do it again. Does that mean I'm not a believer?' That is a very real issue, and you who are pastors will know how some of these verses worry the Lord's people. That's why we need to get a grasp of this argument and what John is saying and make sure that we're not diluting the thrust of it or, on the other side, we're not pushing it to wrong extremes.

As a general remark, you will notice the purpose that John has in writing. Sometimes a sermon can have altogether the opposite effect from what the preacher intended. So it's good to know what John intended when he wrote, in case we interpret it to mean the very opposite of what he intended. It is therefore important to see the purposes for which he

wrote. Did he say, 'I write these things to you that you mightn't be quite so sure as you have been hitherto? I write these things to you to take the confidence out of you'? Well no, of course not. The thrust of the epistle, the thrust of these tests indeed, is this:

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life. (5:13)

These tests are not written to cause true people of God to doubt. The very opposite is his intention and that's not me trying to excuse myself. That's quoting John.

And again, if you'd like to take a snippet of the thought-flow, John says in 2:1, 'My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father'. In other words, he's writing these things, as we shall see when we come to them, to comfort us. 'If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin' (1:7).

We don't have to hide our sins. The very opposite is true.

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins . . . If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar. (1:8-10)

So is John saying that it doesn't really matter if I sin? Certainly not. 'I am writing these things so that you may *not* sin' (2:1). But the fact remains, if anybody does sin, there is provision for them. So even within the detail, you see how John is working. He is not working to disturb believers in the sense of making them doubt their salvation and casting them into gloom and depression and thinking that they can never be sure. That's why it is very necessary for us to understand the whole flow of the thing and not take verses out of their context. We'll come to that perhaps in the second part of our study.

On the other hand, it is absolutely true that he does give us tests so as to uncover and expose what is false doctrine and false behaviour. In those three long passages warning against false christs and false spirits and false gods, we shall see that these were very important issues in John's day. We are now moving into an age where increasing mysticism, coupled with liberalism in doctrine, will bring about a situation very similar to what John was fighting against in his day—doctrines about christs that are not Christian, about the great world spirit, about mystical communion with God. All have a veneer of seeking the true God, but are quite false. John is very strong about it and gives us tests so that we may uncover this and avoid it.

AUDIENCE: In my King James version, chapter 3, verse 9 says, 'Whosoever is born of God does not commit sin'—that's quite explicit and will hit you hard. When we try to understand that, sometimes the idea comes that it's the difference between natures: I do sin because that's the old nature and the new nature of God doesn't sin.

DWG: That's interesting. Let's open it up now to discussion, because there are heads here much wiser than mine. What do you normally say, ladies and gentlemen, when these questions arise?

AUDIENCE: Obviously earlier on when he says that if we say we have no sin, we're blind. When we do sin, we recognize it. Is he speaking more of attitude to sin than the actuality of it? That if we're born of God, we are no longer casual or blasé about our sin and it drives us to a point of confessing, so that the advocate becomes real to us at that moment?

DWG: Well, I tend to think it is that: it's talking about attitude. The man that goes on sinning and has no intention of repenting, doesn't care tuppence about it and carries on sinning regardless. No believer does that, does he? Or if he does, he raises very serious questions as to whether he is a believer. Any other suggestions?

AUDIENCE: I usually thought of that in terms of habitual sin. When you become a believer, your new nature and everything that Christ has done for us, we are someone special. We're a new creation, we're in Christ, and all the other good things that we've come to understand, and we are no longer comfortable with sin. And the difference is between someone who habitually sins and is comfortable with that, or someone who's a genuine believer and can never be comfortable with sin.

DWG: That's what our friend was saying here.

AUDIENCE: It has to do with the character of the child of God and the direction of his life, in the context of 3:3, which says, 'Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself'; which indicates, first of all, that he's not, on a practical level, completely pure, so it's a direction of travel. There is a hope that characterizes the child of God into moving in that direction. It's not perfection, but a process towards it. Is the person characterized by increasingly moving in that direction; or is he characterized as someone who sins and sins and has no moral conscience about it?

DWG: In other words, this is pointing to basic character, but within that basic character for a believer, there can be inconsistencies.

AUDIENCE: In Romans 7, Paul says that he wants to do what is right but sometimes ends up doing the opposite. And it might be that the believer who might want it the most, could be the believer who's defeated the most. Usually they're struggling and their greatest joy would be to be free of all that.

DWG: Yes, surely, and as a hymn writer put it,

And none, O Lord, have perfect rest,
For none are wholly free from sin;
And they who fain would serve Thee best
Are conscious most of wrong within.⁹

As we shall see in a minute, if you walk in the dark you won't be so conscious of sin. The nearer you get to the Lord and you walk in the light, you won't feel yourself better; you'll feel yourself worse. The question that I think arises in all this discussion is, if John is dealing with character, so to speak, this is the direction of character. The believer that wants to

⁹ Henry Twells (1823–1900), 'At even 'ere the sun was set.'

please God, he's struggling with sin, but his character is in this direction. He wants to please God. He confesses his sin, says it makes him miserable. He wants deliverance, even though he falls. But if it is character, then the question arises: can a true believer live out of character?

If you take an example, our Lord said, and laid it down categorically, 'Whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven' (Matt 10:33). That's very severe, isn't it? Well what shall we say of Peter? He did deny the Lord and used all the swear words he knew to convince the folk standing around that he wasn't a believer. What do these verses say to people like that? We know, of course that, (1) Peter was a genuine believer; and (2) we know from what our Lord said that underneath, he didn't cease to be a believer. Our Lord's remarks to Peter are, 'You're going to deny me, but I've prayed for you that your faith shall not fail' (Luke 22:32, own trans.). Not, 'That your godliness shouldn't fail,' or, 'Your courage shouldn't fail.' They all failed and his testimony went out the window. Our Lord didn't pray that any of those things shouldn't fail. The thing that he prayed for was that his faith shouldn't fail and, of course, underneath, Peter had remained a believer and was restored. 'And *when* [not, *if*] you are restored, strengthen your brothers.'

But if you had been standing by Peter when he was denying the Lord with oaths and curses, and somebody said to you, 'This chap Peter, is he a believer?' what would you have said? 'Well I thought he was. I do believe he loved the Lord, but if he himself is saying, "I'm not," well how can I say he is?' But it turned out in the event that, yes, he was, and he was restored. So if we talk about this, we should have to recognize that it is possible for a believer at certain times to act completely out of character. That does actually call into question how genuine his profession of faith is. But then we must remember that such people can be restored, as distinct from the Judases of this world, who never was a believer. Our Lord didn't pray for him that his faith shouldn't fail: he never did have any to start with. That is important.

I think also what will come to light as we get down to some detail is the difference between the conditions that God lays down for having fellowship with God and the evidence that we have fellowship with God. There is a very big difference between those two and John himself is careful to point it out. Babies don't get life by crying, but if a newborn baby doesn't cry, you'll be very worried. A baby's crying is the evidence he has life. He didn't get life by crying, but because he has life, he cries, and if he didn't cry, you'd get very worried. There's a difference between the condition upon which you receive life and the evidence that you have life. I think we shall find that John makes that distinction very carefully in his early chapters.

AUDIENCE: One other thing. In your synopsis, you're suggesting almost that John contrasts having fellowship with God with being a child of God. Is it possible to have fellowship with God in any other context than that of being a child of God?

DWG: When John is saying 'that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ' (1:3), I personally think he is using the word *fellowship* in a deeper and more fundamental sense than we sometimes use it. Sometimes in Christian circles, when we talk about having fellowship with God, we're talking about some kind of

experience that goes on, say in prayer, and there is a two-way process of sharing or whatever—and this is having fellowship or *communion* as it is sometimes called. You might be out of communion with the Lord, still a believer, but out of communion because you've sinned. When you confess your sin, the communion is restored and people have understood John to mean by 'fellowship', that kind of day-to-day communion with the Lord.

But in Greek, to have fellowship often means to share something in common—to have joint ownership with another person. So in practical terms, when we read that Peter and company, when they caught the marvellous catch of fish, called to their partners to come and help them, they were partners in their fishing business. Now in what sense is John saying, 'I write unto you that you may have fellowship with us'? Does he mean simply praying to God, or praising God? I suggest it is this deeper sense. What we have fellowship with is this eternal life which was with the Father and has now been manifest to us. John and James and all the company of apostles said, 'We saw that life. We touched, felt, handled it.' That was absolutely marvellous, to wake up to the fact that the man travelling in your boat is that eternal life that was with the Father and has now been manifested; and you're sharing with him as God is sharing with him, sharing in him.

That is a colossal concept and I'm inclined to read it at that highest level. John the apostle—who witnessed the incarnation, travelled with him, touched him, handled him, meditated upon him, beheld him, contemplated him, saw him—came to share in the very life of Christ, and in sharing the life of Christ, was sharing something with God. So he writes to us that we may have fellowship in this sense of sharing the very life of God. That becomes important, for when we come down to these conditions,—'If we walk in the light, as he is the light, we have fellowship' (1:7)—it isn't just that we're on good terms in the sense that we're today talking to each other and enjoying our quiet time. It is the much more fundamental thing—sharing with God in eternal life, sharing the very life of God, possessing that life. And that's what I would want to say. To be a child of God is not just to have happy times of communion, important as they are, but being a child of God is to share the very life of God. That would be absolutely fundamental.

1 John

Eternal Life and Fellowship with God

As we have seen, when John writes,

That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. (1 John 1:3)

What he means by *fellowship* is not just that we shall have happy times of communion in our prayer life and praise life with the divine Persons. It is a more fundamental thing—that we share with them in something. Like Peter and his partners were sharers in a business, that is, they didn't just talk to each other, but they shared something together. So here, fellowship means fellow partaking in eternal life. If that is so, this is a magnificent statement which ought to provoke in our hearts the most profound worship and amazement. It's not just that we talk to God and pray to God and he talks to us; what has been manifested is that eternal life which was with the Father, to the Father's eternal satisfaction.

That life has been manifested, and you can feel the excitement that runs down the pen of the apostle as he puts the words there. He's talking about the delightful life of Christ as they saw it, and then came to realize that this was God incarnate. This is the very life of God expressed. They contemplated and handled it and assure us that this was real—not some imaginary philosophical construct or daydream. This was the very life of God expressed in the person of Jesus Christ. The wonder was that before he left, he indicated how they might be one with him and he in them and they in him. As he was in the Father and the Father was in him, so they together, the Father and the Son, would be in his people and his people in them. They would share the very life of God: that's what we have in common.

Sharing in the life of God

Now you say, 'What difference is there in all this?' Well a very big practical difference, because you will hear some dear believers say, 'Well, yes, of course I'm saved, but some days I enjoy communion with the Lord, but if I sin, that communion is broken.' Now that may well be true, but they think that's what John is talking about here—that if we sin, our fellowship with God is broken. But if fellowship with God is partaking in the very life of God, can that partaking be broken? Do you lose your eternal life if you sin as a believer? No, of course not. A human child has his father's life. In that profound sense, he shares with his

father the father's life—the genes of the father are in the child. Now the child may misbehave and be out of sorts with his father, but he still has the life of his father.

Conditions for . . . Evidence of . . .

I submit that John is talking about fellowship in that most fundamental sense. He now lays down the conditions upon which that fellowship may be had, and then talks about the evidences that we've got it. So let me make some distinctions that we may expect in these verses—the conditions for sharing God's life and the evidences that we share God's life. It is very important that we make that distinction in our thinking. Just like the analogy we used before, a little baby doesn't get life by crying. He gets it by an altogether different principle, but if he has life, he will cry. If the child never cries that would be serious, because it's evidence he doesn't have life. So there's a difference between conditions for having and evidence that we have.

The difference can be expressed in other terms. When John talks about the conditions, he talks about our walking, but it is a question of *where* we walk. When he talks about the evidences, it becomes a question of *how* we walk. Let's look at the actual text.

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practise the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. (1:5–7)

The all important thing at that stage is *where* we walk. When you come to the next chapter, John is talking about the evidences, not the conditions.

Whoever says, 'I know him' but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. (2:4–6)

Now it's not a question of where you walk, but *how* you walk. Do everybody's translations agree with the basic facts and observations? At first sight that might feel like splitting hairs, but this is inspired Scripture, verbally inspired, and the prepositions are exceedingly important—the difference of where we walk and how we walk.

The condition for fellowship—where we walk

So let's go back to that initial thing then.

God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practise the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. (1:5–7)

The first and only condition is laid down here, because sharing the life of God is simply this: that if we walk in the light, we do have fellowship. Notice it doesn't say that if first of all you repent of your sin and the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses you from all sin, then you are free to come and walk in the light. It doesn't put it that way round. It says first that if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship. This is the condition. You say, 'But what about my sin then?' Well that's a point. If we walk in the light as he is in the light, there is provision for that sin and we will come to that in a moment.

The first prime condition is if we walk in the light—*where* we walk. But notice the verb is not 'if we *come* to the light, we have fellowship with one another', but 'if we *walk* in the light'. It's a Hebrew idiom for behaviour—walking—and we walk in the light, not just come to it. The classical place where this kind of thing is told us at length is the Gospel of John, chapter 8, where our Lord announces himself as 'the light of the world' (8:12). After much long discussion, we're told that, as he said these things, many of the Jews believed on him.

So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, 'If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.' They answered him, 'We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say "You will become free"?' Jesus answered them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house for ever; the son remains for ever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.' (John 8:31–36)

They had come to the light and they had professed to believe, but as they began to walk in the light, the light exposed them. That's what light does. Their sins were exposed and now the following verses show how uncomfortable that became. They said, 'We're Abraham's offspring.'

Said Christ, 'If you're Abraham's offspring, you wouldn't seek to kill me, would you? Abraham didn't do that kind of thing.'

They said, 'We have one Father, even God.'

'Oh, really?' said Christ. 'If God were your Father, you'd love me, wouldn't you?'

Well then they really got annoyed and he had to tell them, 'Far from being Abraham's true spiritual offspring and children of God, you are of your father, the devil' (8:44, own trans.).

They picked up stones to stone him—to put the light out. It's not enough to come to the light; one has to be prepared to walk in it, continue in it, stay in it, live in it. Yes, but you say, 'If I come to the light like that and walk in it, it will expose me.'

It certainly will.

'Well then, if it exposes my sin that breaks my fellowship.'

No, it doesn't.

'If I'm prepared to come and walk in the light, I may have eternal life, I may share the life of God. What about my sin?'

The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, deals with that. The one condition is, we must be prepared to come and walk in the light as he is in the light.

Walking in the light

Now that has practical implications. I remember years ago, I was asked to go to the north of Cambridgeshire to a farmer and his wife. She had been nominally Anglican and he nominally Methodist, and someone had prevailed upon them to go to some great evangelistic campaign in Cambridge. They had both stood up at one of the meetings to profess faith in the Lord. That was marvellous, and the friend who was interested in them asked me if I would go along and take some Bible studies in their home. So I tried to do that to the best of my ability, and the dear lady came to me very tearfully at one stage and said, 'I went to the meetings and I professed to be saved, but since I've been saved, I've been worse than I was before I was saved. Therefore, I'm not saved.'

That's a very logical proposition, if you work it out. What had happened to the dear lady? Well before, she'd been nominally religious, but walking far distant from the Lord; but now she had come to the light. As we come to the light, and start to walk in it, the inevitable result is that it exposes our sins, and instead of feeling marvellously good, we don't feel so good as we felt before. Yes, but it can be a very healthy sign. We've come to the light. What we must not do is turn round and go off, like those men did in John 8. The only condition for having fellowship with God is to come and walk in the light. When it exposes my sin, then God has provision for it. The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin.

The next phrase is, 'If we say that we have no sin'—instead of admitting it—but what does that mean, 'to have sin'? You could read the verse simply as saying that we are sinless. There are very few people that would maintain that they are sinless. The phrase 'to have sin' is a phrase you'll find in the Gospel of John and in the Epistles of John. Says our Lord, 'If you were blind, you should have no sin' (John 9:41 KJV). He doesn't mean if you were spiritually blind you would be sinlessly perfect. He means if you were spiritually blind, you would not be blameworthy, you would not be guilty. You can't be blamed for not seeing what you can't see. Likewise, 'If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin,'—that doesn't mean they would have been sinless, but that they couldn't be blamed for not believing what they never heard—'but now they have no excuse for their sin' (John 15:22).

So here, 'If we say we have no sin'—meaning, if we claim it isn't our fault—'we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us' (1 John 1:8). So you have your choice how you translate it. Is a man saying, 'I have no sin, I'm sinless', or is he saying, like so many do nowadays, that 'Yes, well I have these urges and whatnot, but I'm not to be blamed for them: it's in my genes'? That is, they are denying responsibility for their sin and therefore they can't help it. That won't do. If we say that, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. What we must do is to confess it, but let's not read it simply as saying, 'Oh, this is some terrible condition that I have to fulfil: I have to confess it.' We can put it like that if we wish, but the thing is gospel—good news. You don't have to hide it: you can confess it. Some people don't like doing it, but the marvel is that if we confess it, there is forgiveness. It's senseless digging your heels in and denying it. 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness' (v. 9).

And the other claim in verse 10: 'If we say we have not sinned,'—notice the difference here between that and verse 8: if we say we have not actually committed wrong deeds—'we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.' Chapter 2 is going to put the opposite to that:

But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.
(2:1–2)

Notice all the way through the conditions then, the marvellous grace of God being emphasized. If we're prepared to come and walk in the light—that is the sole condition, come and walk in it—then in spite of the sin it exposes, the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin.

AUDIENCE: *Sorry, Dr Gooding, when you say 'walk in the light', what are you actually referring to, if there's other language?*

DWG: That's a good question. *Walk* is a Hebrew metaphor for to live and behave. The men that came to our Lord in the Gospel of John, they physically came to him, because he was there present, so they came to him and they listened to what he said. Some of them, like Thomas and John and Peter, continued with him, stayed with him and, as he taught them, they abode in his word, continued in it. There were others that, when they heard what the Lord was exactly saying, turned back and they walked no more with him. And our Lord turned round to the twelve and he said, 'Will you also go away?' So here was 'walking' in the literal sense, when he was here on earth. They came to him and some of them continued with him. Others walked no more with him. They went back: in other words, they didn't follow him.

But then of course, the word takes on a deeper meaning. He's not here physically, but if I want to share the life of God, I must come and walk where God is, as God is in the light. I must come and walk in that light. I must come and walk with the Saviour, daily. These are the terms. Does that begin to make sense?

AUDIENCE: Yes. I just wonder how it relates to the concept of grace? Maybe I have the wrong end of the stick, but it almost sounds as though we have this responsibility to be continually there.

DWG: We do, yes.

AUDIENCE: But that is after salvation, yes?

DWG: Well, perhaps put it, as you come to the Lord and you get salvation. I have a bit of an old jalopy car and when it goes wrong, I take it to the garage man. I just did this last week. He puts it right and when he puts it right I say, 'Thank you very much, garage man. Goodbye.' I don't stay in the garage. I don't stay with the mechanic. I just go to him when I'm in trouble and then I go off. Is that how you get saved? You want eternal life, you come to Christ and then say, 'Thank you very much for the gift. Bye-bye.' Is that how you get saved? I would rather fancy if you put that to the apostles, they'd say, 'No, you don't do it like that.' 'Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest' (Matt 11:28). We come to the Saviour, but does that mean we just come like I come to the grocer

and say, 'I want a packet of tea', and he gives me the packet of tea and I say, 'Goodbye', and perhaps never go again? I come to Christ and he gives me eternal life and I just walk off, and I've still got eternal life, but I don't walk with him? What would you say to that?

AUDIENCE: Yes. I see what you mean. What I have normally said to people in this context is that walking in the light is walking with our lives open to the Scripture. In other words, my behaviour moment by moment is subject to the standards of Scripture and that I am walking in the light when I allow my behaviour to be judged by Scripture.

DWG: Marvellous.

AUDIENCE: Tom Geddes told a story about walking in the jungle in the dark, and one person had a Tilley lamp and the Tilley lamp was shone on a small patch of ground. And the only way they could walk in safety was to walk close to each other in the light, because if they got out of the light, they were in darkness and couldn't see where they were going. The picture seems to be a very good illustration of the same truth; that it's walking close to the standards of Scripture, close to the Lord, and allowing our lives to be judged in that way, and confess and put right when we fail.

DWG: I agree with you. 'Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path' (Ps 119:105). So we have to walk in the light of Scripture. Suppose I substituted for that John 8:12, where Christ says, 'I am the light of the world.' So walking in the light means walking close to Christ. Let me put it crudely. Sometimes being crude and putting things in extremes helps us to think through things. Is there a salvation that says you can come to Christ, receive salvation and then go off from him? You've still got salvation, but you're not walking in communion with the Lord. Is there such a salvation?

AUDIENCE: No. And the very ethos of our work within Evangelical Ministries is to make people disciples.

DWG: Yes, sir.

AUDIENCE: Being a disciple entails an ongoing relationship, rather than a believe-ism. In terms of Christ, it's not simply an encounter I once had. I believe in him because I'm with him day-by-day. I'm a follower and a disciple.

DWG: Absolutely so, and you are of course citing what John 8 is saying, 'If you continue in my word, then are you my disciples indeed and you will know the truth and the truth will make you free' (v. 31, own trans.). Well it wasn't long after that they took up stones to stone him. They'd come to the light, they'd said they believed on it, but when they found the light exposing them, they were not prepared to walk in the light. What would you say of such Jews? Well they were believers, because they came to Christ and they believed on him, but they weren't prepared to walk in his light, but had they got eternal life anyway?

AUDIENCE: Very often it's been presented as a kind of insurance policy—that you can bring out your bit of paper and claim it, when necessary. But it's not a life and there are thousands of people, I suspect, wandering around Northern Ireland who have prayed, or made some kind of response like the Jews did in John 8, but didn't stay.

DWG: I may be confusing things a little, because I'm using terms in a slightly different way from what sometimes they use in evangelical circles. But that will have the great benefit of bringing us back to what Scripture says, and the condition for having fellowship with God is if we walk in the light.

Now of course, some of the confusion I may be creating is because I have defined fellowship with God as that fundamental sharing the very life of God. That is what eternal life is. That may be crude, but you see, sometimes we hear ourselves and other folks talking as though eternal life is a sort of gift like Santa Claus brings at Christmas, all tied up with ribbon, and now we've got it. 'Thank you very much, Santa Claus.' He goes back to the North Pole, or wherever it is he hangs out, and we've got the eternal life whether we have anything to do with him. Well, we welcome him the next Christmas, but we've got eternal life. No, you don't.

Listen to Paul in Colossians 3:3–4: 'your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life . . .' (vv. 3–4)—we don't have any life apart from Christ. Eternal life is sharing the life of God. That's what it is. You can't then take that life and say, 'I have no interest in Christ for the time being. I've got all I need'—like I treat my garage man. I don't have life without Christ. That's an impossibility. Having eternal life is sharing the life of God and the condition for sharing the life of God is that we walk in the light, as he is in the light. It's not saying you must walk perfectly. It's not how you walk. It's where you walk. What do I mean by the difference? Well let me take a little illustration.

Walking in the light—illustrated

I have, from time to time, lectured on the Jewish tabernacle, and my friends think I've got tabernacle on the brain! The tabernacle was an oblong building and it had a veil across the part where there was the ark with the cherubim on top, and there was the mercy seat, or *propitiatory* as it's called. Outside the veil was the candlestick with its six branches, and sitting opposite it was a table called the table of showbread, and on it were twelve loaves. And here was a little altar called the incense altar, where the priest prayed as he stood here at the time of prayer and burnt the incense. He addressed the prayers to God, who was present between the cherubim above the mercy seat. That was the arrangement.

Now the loaves on this table were put there primarily for God. They were put there at the beginning of the week and left for a whole week for God. At the end of the week, the priests were allowed to come to the table, and they took the old bread off and put new bread on for God. The old bread they took away and they ate it in a Holy Place—a very simple symbol that man was allowed to share the same table with God. That's a marvellous example of what fellowship means, and could be an illustration for us, at the practical level, of what John is talking about. That bread of God which satisfied God with all God's infinite capacity; that eternal life which was with the Father. 'In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God' (John 1:1). God's infinite delight and satisfaction. That life was manifest and now for us becomes the very bread of God and we are invited to come and partake of that very bread of which God partakes. That's fellowship.

Now, immediately across from the table there was the lampstand with its seven lamps, shedding their beams of light. Now here's a priest, and he wants to have fellowship with

God. But to have fellowship with God at that table, he must come and walk in the light. I sometimes say, talking about this, suppose a young priest comes in and this is the first time he exercises this holy privilege to come and take the bread, to eat the bread. And he's so flustered, he knows all he should do, but he's overcome with the awe of the situation and his toe catches in the bottom of his robe and he falls flat on his face. Well, he's in the light. He isn't walking very well in the light, in fact he's fallen over, but he's fallen over in the light. So says the illustration. The condition of sharing the life of God, having eternal life and enjoying it with God, because it is a life, is that we walk in the light as he is in the light. There is no other possible way, for eternal life is God's life. He doesn't just break off a bit of eternal life and say, 'There you are. Now you can go off by yourself.' It is sharing the life of God, so we must come where God is and walk in the light with God.

Thank God, it's not how you walk. It doesn't say, 'If you walk one hundred percent perfectly, you have fellowship.' If that were the condition, none of us would ever come: we would never enjoy eternal life. The condition is *where* you walk, not how. Mercifully, when the light exposes us, the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin. That is how it is possible for God to have fellowship with us. We mustn't forget. We talk about believers who are wilfully sinning maybe and say, 'Ah, that breaks the fellowship.' We forget that you and I, sitting here this morning, touching the holy word of God, we're downright sinners anyway. And if God demanded 'walking perfectly' of any one of us, none of us in this room would qualify: we are sinful in God's sight. If we saw God like Isaiah saw him, we would be overwhelmed with a sense of our sinfulness even now. The marvellous grace of God is that, if you're prepared to come and walk in the light, even though it exposes you for what you are, the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin.

Of course, if we're so stupid as to say we don't have any sin, we deceive ourselves. We forget that inside us there are still wrong attitudes, sinful attitudes in our hearts, that we're often not aware of. And as we go on in life, we discover things about ourselves that we never knew were there. Before, we were living in a kind of false paradise. These things were there, but we didn't recognize them. If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves, but we can confess it. There's the marvel of it. We don't have to pretend. We confess our sins and 'if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us'. He's interested in not just forgiveness, but cleansing us and constantly cleansing us, and cleansing us from all unrighteousness. That's a very long process. He doesn't demand that that cleansing be complete and perfect before we're allowed to come and have fellowship with him. That work of cleansing will go on as long as we are on earth, the constant cleansing us from all unrighteousness. Not only unrighteous deeds, but unrighteousness in the twists and turns of our personalities that God is working on, cleansing them away.

It's a long, long process, but we don't have to wait until it's finished. We can come and walk in the light. It's not only about perverse character, but our actual deeds. If we say, 'We have not sinned', of course we have sinned, we deceive ourselves. But don't get this wrong. Says John, 'I'm not saying all this to encourage you to sin and to make you think that sin doesn't matter. I'm writing it for the very opposite reason. I write to you so that you don't sin. Don't get it the wrong way round, but while that is so, if we will confess our sins, if

anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins.' That's lovely.

Did you notice the progression? First of all, the man says, 'I have no sin'. Secondly, the man says, 'I have not sinned'. That's bad, we're not to do that. We are to walk in the light. We are to confess our sins. We are to admit that we have sinned. But now listen to this, 'If anyone does sin'—and it doesn't say 'and if then he confesses it'—'if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous'. Look at our little illustration for a moment. The priest has to come and walk in the light to have fellowship with God. This altar was the altar of intercession and prayer. Look at that, 'If we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship, one with another, and if anyone does sin . . .'—and immediately, you've got an advocate with the Father to take up your case. This little incense altar had horns on it and they took the blood of the sin offering and they put it on these horns. This was the power of the intercession. 'If anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins.' That is the basis of his advocacy with the Father, to maintain us in fellowship.

Advocate and propitiation

How can God continue sharing his life with somebody that has sinned, and they haven't even realized they've sinned? You say, 'But the holiness of God will demand he cut them off forthwith.' No, because 'if anyone does sin, we have an advocate'. Now notice the term that's used; 'He is the propitiation for our sins'. What does that mean? The New Testament word is *propitiation*; sometimes it's translated *atonement* in the Old Testament. We read of the great day of propitiation, the great Day of Atonement, when the high priest entered the Holiest of all once a year. The tabernacle, the dwelling place of God, was positioned with the people all around it, and God says, 'The very presence of the people defiles my tabernacle' (Lev 15:31, own trans.). So the Day of Atonement was instituted to cleanse the tabernacle from all the defilements it incurred by remaining among the people. You think of God, who allows us to come and have fellowship with him, and we are sinful folks still. How can God continue with us and maintain us and share his life with us still, when we are sinful people even when we haven't realized it?

The marvellous answer is that the blood of Christ acts as a propitiation for our sins; that makes it possible for God to restrain his wrath and anger. It's the blood that acts as a propitiation and allows God, in full justice, to carry on in fellowship with us. That is magnificent, you know. I look back on my youth to what I may have thought was marvellous Christian spirit. I look back at it now with horror. The pride and stupidity and folly and all the rest of it, and God allowed me still to continue in his presence and didn't take his eternal life away from me, and allowed me still to share with him his eternal life in Christ.

How can he possibly do it? When I become conscious of sin, I must confess it, of course. I mustn't deny I have inward sin. I mustn't deny the particular sins I've done, but even when I sin and I don't even realize I've sinned, I have an advocate who's able to maintain that

fellowship with God. Justly, he is a propitiation for our sins, Jesus Christ the righteous. That is God's provision so that we come and share his eternal life.

AUDIENCE: This concept of walking and remaining walking in the light almost implies to me that you can walk away from it and therefore the notion of eternal salvation. I may just be complicating the thing.

DWG: You're asking whether the very term 'walk in the light' implies that you can walk out of it—meaning what? What is walking out of the light? Giving up your faith? What is the opposite of walking in the light? It's walking in darkness, but what does that mean? You see you have two main choices, don't you? The common interpretation would be that John is saying believers have eternal life. Now having eternal life, a believer should walk in the light. That is in the light of God's word and daily searching his word, and have quiet time and fellowship with the Lord. But of course it is possible for a believer not to come and walk in the light. He still has eternal life, but he doesn't walk in the light, as in he neglects Scripture, he neglects prayer, he doesn't walk in active communion with the Lord. He's still walking somewhere or other, but he's not walking in the light of Scripture, but does he still have eternal life?

So if he's not walking in the light of Scripture, in John's terms does that mean he's walking in the dark? And that would mean that he's living perhaps a sinful life and a worldly life and is walking in the dark, and then you'll have to say, 'He's not having practical fellowship with God.' And when you meet that verse, 'If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practise the truth' (1 John 1:6), then you'll have to take it to mean we have daily communion with God, but we don't, because we're living a sinful life and we're not confessing our sin, and we're not walking in the light of Scripture. So we're walking in the dark—but do we still have eternal life?

The difficulty with my interpretation would be, I'm saying that fellowship with God is not just quiet communion with the Lord. It's the basic thing of sharing the very life of God. That's what eternal life is, and therefore the condition for having eternal life is walking in the light. You feel that risks too much? That might suggest that the condition for having eternal life at all is walking in the light, then a believer could decide to walk out of the light and then he would lose his eternal life. Do we all see the difference? On reflection you might say, 'No, that won't do.' Walking in the light is simply a matter of a Christian who already has eternal life and can't lose it, just having proper fellowship with the Lord, day-by-day, in his word. But if a believer cuts that out, he's now walking in darkness, but he still has eternal life, and that would mean you can walk in darkness but still share the life of God, wouldn't it? Yes, that's what you would be saying. You can share the life of God, which is eternal life, and walk in darkness. I think I would hesitate to go that far. I don't know how you would feel. Can you share the very life of God, that eternal life, your life, which is hidden with Christ in God, and walk in darkness?

AUDIENCE: We have an example. I mean, maybe it's not an example, but I'm just thinking of John's little comment about Judas when he went out.

DWG: 'And it was night' (John 13:30). I would suggest that the difficulty that arises here, and what is going through our heads, is the difficulty that we meet elsewhere. 'Everyone

who thus hopes in him purifies himself' (1 John 3:3). He doesn't say, 'Everyone who thus hopes *ought* to purify himself.' And the man who isn't purifying himself, well you say, 'Then he doesn't have the hope', because it's a straightforward statement. The man says, 'I hope to be like Christ one day.' Well if he's sincere, he'll want to be like Christ today; and he'll say, 'Well I'm far-off like Christ and therefore I do seriously take this. I want to purify myself, because one day I hope to be like Christ. I want to be like him now and so I purify myself.' The man that is careless and doesn't purify himself, how can he convincingly say, 'But I do have the hope of being like Christ one day'? That would be a contradiction, wouldn't it? But if you put it starkly like that, light and dark, you have the hope or you don't have the hope, that erases all those problems. 'He that sins is of the devil'; the mark of a child of God is he doesn't sin. Well if you put it that starkly, like John does, you're going to raise the question of what happens in the question of inconsistency.

AUDIENCE: I've always thought that the opposite of the light is walking in darkness, but I'm wondering is that so? Is the opposite of walking in the light, *not* walking in the light, rather than walking in darkness? In other words, the light is still there, but it is the emphasis on whether we're walking—making the most of what we ought to be making. But the opposite of that is that—while the light is still there and the grace of God isn't withdrawn from us—we're simply not deriving the benefit from it. If I was to go out of here today and, rather than turn left to go home to my wife and family, I turned right and went on the ferry and went to live in Scotland, I'd still be married. I would still have that relationship, but I wouldn't be living in the light of that. It wouldn't cancel out the relationship, but it would cancel out the use and the implications of it. Could that be it? Are we wrong in thinking that it's either the choice between light and darkness, when it's really the choice between walking and not walking; the light remains.

DWG: Yes, that's right, the light remains and here, I would want to come and say, it is basically the question of where we walk, rather than how we're walking. Perhaps we are good believers, and we're not walking very well, but it's not a question of how we walk, it's where we walk. But in the question of people being a long time backsliding, so to speak, let me point out three stories. The one is the one you know—of Peter, who denied the Lord. A terrible inconsistency, so much so that if you'd been standing by him when he swore all his oaths and curses and said he wasn't a believer and wasn't a follower of Christ, you'd say, 'Well I think he is, but what can you say when the man himself says he isn't?' The question is, was he still? When he said he wasn't a believer, was he telling a big whopper of a lie? Horribly inconsistent, but he was a believer, in spite of his disgraceful behaviour. We know he was still a believer, because the Lord says so, and he was restored, and that wasn't a very long incident, but let me name you two other things.

When I first came to live over here in Ireland, I suppose it would have been about 1960, there was a gentleman in this province and as a young man he was brought up in a Gospel Hall, and he believed the Lord and he began to preach and apparently he was an acceptable preacher. He went into business and he went up to Londonderry, where he was presented, so he subsequently told me, with a rather shady business deal. He had a bad conscience about it, but looked around and saw other professed believers who were businessmen,

doing these kinds of deals, and he did it himself. For him it proved the beginning of a slippery slope downwards. He prospered in business, he had a factory, prospered well, and was far away from the Lord. This went on for nearly forty years. He got very bitter against Christianity, he was going to write a book against the brethren, as he told me. His business began to go downhill. He had problems with his nerves and alcohol and he was in a very bad way. He tried to keep his business afloat and was under a psychiatrist for his nerves at the time.

He was coming back through Belfast early one Sunday morning, having been in his factory until about two o'clock in the morning. There was a Victoria Hall in May Street at that time and he saw on the noticeboard that dogsbody was to preach on Sunday, and some curious desire got hold of him to hear dogsbody preach. I don't know whether anybody in his right mind would, but that's how it was! Now this was a chap who, for years, would take his father to the gospel meeting at night, drop him outside the door and come back to fetch him later, but would not go in himself, who was now suddenly overwhelmed with this desire to come and hear this chap preach. Now it so happened at that stage I was preaching four sermons on a Sunday night on the confessions of the apostles—that is, what the apostles said about how they came to faith in Christ, and this night I'd come to Peter. And there were four or five hundred folks there.

I didn't know anything about this chap anyway, and I preached on Peter, who discovered Christ as a rock, a solid rock beneath his feet, to whom coming as a living stone and all that, and why that meant a lot to Peter. I spoke about the times when he felt himself sinking, when he tried to walk on the water and went down, and how Christ saved him. And the awful time in the high priest's court when panic got hold of him, and I happened to say as an illustration, 'Like a man falling in a pit and trying to grab the sides, only to find they're slimy and he can't get a grip and he's sinking, sinking, sinking', and how he found the Saviour and the Saviour brought him back. Well the Monday or Tuesday after, I got a phone call from this man, asking if I would have lunch with him. And he came back to the Lord. You just imagine the kindness of the Lord with him. Forty years away and the first time he comes to listen to the gospel preached in forty years, God has it that he hears a story of Peter. And he said to me, 'When you said last night in the pulpit that Peter felt himself falling down a great shaft into the dark and he was trying to grab hold, but he couldn't get a hold and he was sinking, that was absolutely me. That's how I feel.' That impressed me. Not with him, but with the Lord. Forty years away and this is a shepherd that brings folks back.

I was in Peebles in Scotland about eight years ago for a weekend's conference. After the service on the Sunday night, my host took me out for a walk through the streets of Peebles. It's a very pleasant town and we were going up some very nice shady avenues with big houses. And there joined us a man in his middle life, from the church, and then he had to part from us and went off in another direction. And my host said, 'Do you know that chap has only recently come to the Lord, in his mid-forties, and feels he's wasted his time all these years. And now he's converted, he wants to give himself fully to the Lord, and he didn't know what to do. So he came to me and told me he'd had an idea. "I've got a lot of beautiful records of Christian music and I'm going to go round the houses, knock the door, and when

they come to the door I'm going to say, 'Look, I've got these lovely records of Christian music and I thought they were so nice you might like to borrow them.'"

And my host said, 'You see that house there? That was the first house he came to.' It was a beautiful, big house. 'He knocked, a man came to the door. He said, "Excuse me, but I'm a Christian and I've got these records. It's such beautiful Christian music, I wondered whether you'd like to borrow them?" And the man said, "You'd better come in", and showed him into a room and called his wife. "We want to tell you our situation. We're both believers. We've been away from the Lord for forty years and last night, in this room, we came back to the Lord and we told the Lord, 'Lord, if you'll have us back, please send us confirmation tomorrow that you've forgiven us and received us'." And he said, "We were sitting here and the day has gone nearly by and it was getting nine o'clock at night, and we thought, 'No, God won't have us back at all'. And then you knock on the door'.'

That's the shepherd. That's the advocate with the Father, who makes it possible for God to continue, even with his erring children—when the Holy Spirit gets to work to bring them back. I don't believe any believer can be lost, and that's why I say that sharing eternal life is a thing that, once we have it, can never be broken. Why? Because we have an advocate and when we sin, he is the propitiation. He holds back what otherwise would be the just wrath of God. That's what propitiation is. It makes it possible for God to continue with us in his mercy until we're brought to repentance. That's the magnificence of his ministry.

But anyway, now I put that before you, I'm aware that these things get a little complicated. That my particular interpretation is questionable perhaps, but I put it into the pool of your thinking, because it is an important question. Don't let me deter you if you feel that the verse is to be interpreted that if we walk in the light, we have daily communion with the Lord. That's lovely, and if we walk in the light of Scripture, we have daily concourse with the Lord. If we don't walk in the light and neglect our prayer life or we neglect Scripture, or we positively go into sin and don't confess it, then our practical communion with the Lord is broken. Well that is true of course. My question is whether John means something deeper.

The evidence of fellowship—how we walk

All I want to do just now, because time is getting on, is to go to the other side, where John emphasizes not where we walk, but *how* we walk.

And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says, 'I know him' but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. (2:3–6)

That's not where you walk, but how you walk. If I say I am abiding in Christ, I'm in Christ and I abide in Christ. Now says John, 'You'll need to show evidences of that.' You have a bounden duty, not just to walk in the light, but now it's not only where you walk but how—to walk in the same way in which he walked.' That's our bounden duty and we're

now talking about evidences. Why do I say 'evidences'? Well look again at verse 3, 'By this we know that we have come to know him'. If I say, 'Yes, I know the Lord,' meaning not simply I know about God, but I know him, to know him is eternal life. I do know the Lord in that technical sense of the term. I have eternal life. I know the Lord. The Lord is mine and I am his and I know him. 'I know my own and my own know me' (John 10:14).

Alright. What about the evidences? How do I know that I know the Lord? Well, says John, 'By this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments.' We're not now talking about conditions. We don't have to keep the commandments to be saved. We don't have to keep the commandments to receive eternal life. But once we're saved and we have eternal life and we are in Christ, then it is expected that we show the evidence of it. The evidence, not the condition, is that we keep his commandments. Whoever says, 'I know him', and doesn't keep his commandments is a liar and the truth is not in him. If a baby has life, it will cry, it will throw its arms about, it will eat. If a baby doesn't cry, doesn't throw its arms about, doesn't eat, doesn't do anything, what's the good of saying it's got life?

Moreover, look at verse 5, 'Whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected.' God loves him and he loves the Lord and if you know the Lord, you love the Lord, and if you love the Lord, you'll keep his commandments. Suppose I said to you, 'I love Switzerland. I think it's a magnificent country,' and five minutes later you're talking about it and you say how much you like mountaineering and seeing the mountains. I say,

'Well if there's one thing in life I can't stick that's mountains.'

'And you say you love Switzerland?'

'Oh, I love Switzerland.'

'But you hate mountains?'

Well how do you make sense of that? You would say the man's talking nonsense: he doesn't know Switzerland and can't know Switzerland. It's full of mountains one end to the other. The man's saying he loves Switzerland, but he doesn't like mountains. He just doesn't know Switzerland.

If I say I know God and I don't keep his commandments, well wait a minute! If we know God, we love God, don't we? To know God is to love him and to love him is to keep his commandments, and therefore, if I say I'm in him, I have a bounden duty to walk even as he—that is Christ—walked. That to my mind is the opposite side of this. One is *where* we walk: this is *how* we walk. Those are the conditions upon which we can have eternal life; these are the evidences that show that we have it.

And we'll come to a conclusion now. Let me now show how this kind of balance in thinking is a feature of John's writing. The great burden of John's exhortation is that we shall love.

Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that you have heard. At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. Whoever loves his brother abides in

the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know not where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes. (2:7–11)

Here therefore is the command to love. Verse 15 says ‘Do not love. So here’s a question now of our affections, not so much our walk, but our affections, and they must be likewise in proper balance. We are to love; that is we’re to love our brothers and sisters in Christ, but we’re not to love the world—a balance between the two. It’s possible to get the balance the other way round, to find the world very attractive and our brothers and sisters in Christ not so attractive—to love the world rather than our brothers and sisters.

So here again we’re talking about the tests of life. If I say I am a child of God, then it will affect my affections. I must judge myself by these criteria—not only of righteous behaviour, but now of true love and that true love was loving my brothers and sisters, not loving the world. I’m all ears therefore for you to tell me, when you’re teaching this kind of thing and trying to tell folks about the world, what is worldliness, according to you? How do you explain ‘the world’ to a Christian without, on the one side, turning him into a Pharisee and on the other side, just letting any old thing go? What is the world?

‘The world’

AUDIENCE: I would say that worldliness has to do with an attitude of heart rather than to do with external factors, like the colour of stockings or that kind of thing. The world seems to be something enduring that’s opposed to the Father. The two are opposites and the world has rejected the Son of God. We are those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God, so we overcome the world. It’s almost as if the world is a place where it’s a self-contained unit and people living as if this is all there is and there is no Son of God, there is no God. ‘We’ll worry about that when we die.’ That seems to me to be the essence of worldliness. Whereas the opposite, I suppose—holiness—is our devotion to Jesus as the Son of God and living in accordance with that. We may do a lot of the same things but the difference is in that attitude of heart. If we want to love God, isn’t the world anything that takes away our love or affections for him, in an opposite direction?

DWG: The bad things in the world?

AUDIENCE: No, how we’re influenced by how the world says we’re to live in it. John is talking about love and talking about life and talking about light, and if all of that’s to do with God and represents what we have in God, then the world is anything that takes away from that. And perhaps now you’ll be bringing us to the end by saying that the world is the false christs, the false spirits and the false gods—that’s where the circle of John’s thoughts is taking us.

DWG: Yes, that is very good. These false things are the religious world, as you noticed. That’s not atheism. It’s false christs, antichrists, false spirits, false gods. That is true. We must be aware of it. That is in the realm of our beliefs actually—what we are to believe— but here it’s also our affections. If I were to pin it down to what John says:

For all that is in the world . . . is not from the Father. (2:16)

What does John mean? Didn't he create the world? What does John mean, 'it's not from the Father'? Well John defines it then as the desire of the eyes. Come, come, John, I go down the town and enter some beautiful shop and the colours are magnificent, and the curtains are delightful and the furniture's a nice style. I like it. Is that sinful? Well I don't like the old trash, all the bad things, but the desire of the eyes, I mean, I see a magnificent picture. Oh, I would like that. Is that wrong?

AUDIENCE: One is temporary and one is permanent.

DWG: But how can it not be of the Father? Didn't God give us the artistic device? I don't like this modern music, but the classical music is delightful. Didn't God create music? Is that what I'm not to love?

AUDIENCE: It depends whether it affects our priorities—if it takes a priority that is higher than God, higher than Christ. Mike Wells talked about it and it was quite a good illustration. He talked about an old cartwheel, where you'd have spokes and the hub, of course, was Christ. The spokes could be bad things, but the spokes could also be things that were quite good like music or ministry or sport, or whatever. But if those spokes became the focus of our interest and commitment, they could lead us to the rim, to a life on the rim and a life away from Christ who has come to save us.

DWG: That's right. Surely.

AUDIENCE: I think John is saying two things in this. He obviously intends it to be so. He talks about love of the world, but he also talks about love of the things in the world, so there's a distinction between the two things. There is the world, which I presume refers to an unbiblical philosophy of life, as well as the things that you've been mentioning, which are the things that our eyes desire or our hearts desire. The things that use flesh in that sense. The flesh—the wrong spoke.

DWG: There surely is the subtlety of Satan's temptations. In the garden of Eden, when he came to tempt our foreparents, he didn't tempt them to some outrageously immoral act, some vulgar, terrible, disgraceful outrage. The things he tempted them with were beautiful in the extreme. There were those trees that were good to look at and good for food. There was the tree of life and there was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He didn't tempt them with horrible things. He tempted them with things that God himself had made. And when he pointed out this tree, Eve saw it was good for food—satisfying the flesh. And it was calculated to make one wise—that was intellectual satisfaction. And it was good to look at—that's aesthetic satisfaction. The whole thing was beautiful. Not something vulgar and horrible. But she said, 'I mustn't eat this, for God has said no.' And Satan said, 'Oh, nonsense, woman. God knows that the day you eat that, you'll be as God and you can enjoy it without God.' He used the beautiful things of the garden to tear their hearts away from God.

It tempts me to say sometimes that there'll be more people in hell, seduced there by beautiful things, than there will be who were seduced by evil, horrible things. Of course,

however beautiful the thing is, if it draws my heart away from God, that's terrible. Imagine a very wealthy man and he gives his son a small aeroplane for his twenty-first birthday. The father presents it to the son very proudly, and the son says, 'Thank you very much, Dad', and gets into the aeroplane and says, 'Goodbye, Dad. That's the last you'll see of me', and flies off and never comes back. The father would curse the day he gave that boy the aeroplane. Anything that takes my heart from the Father is the world. It's one of the things in the world.

AUDIENCE: Taking the gifts and rejecting the giver.

DWG: That's right, yes. And that's a very subtle thing. And then to go to the final extreme of that is to boast in what you have, and your goods and your beautiful things, they become your pride of life. That's terrible if they're all from the Father. 'I'm better than you and I pride myself I've a better car than you. You have only a Rover and I've got a Jaguar, and I've got a house in the best part of the city and you haven't. I'm priding myself on this.' Oh, what a sad business when, all told, it's a gift of the Father but I'm so far from the Father's heart and I'm boasting in these things. That becomes my goal in life, my ambition in life, and that's a desperate temptation. I can imagine parents wanting the very best for their children. They want the highest education. There's nothing wrong in it, but God help us lest all those lovely things become the goal in life. Instead of setting before the children God as the goal, all these other things become the goal. It is so easy for Satan then to use them to draw their hearts away from God instead of to the Lord. Not that the things are wrong, but if they draw our hearts away from the Father, it is disastrous.

Our beliefs

Finally, that last section in that first division about the antichrists is now talking of the world in the sense of our beliefs. And John is warning them about antichrists, many going out, thereby we know it's the last time.

They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.
(2:19)

Notice that, incidentally, John is affirming that these men—who had been in the church obviously, and teachers in the church—never were true believers. 'They were never of us,' says John. 'If they had been of us, they would have continued.' Notice that as a statement of principle as we pass by. 'If they had been genuinely of us, they would have continued, but they went out that it might become plain that they are not of us.' They never were true believers. And the epistles which talk about the false teachers of various kinds make this point: 2 Peter 2 makes it and Jude makes it.

But now what is the seriousness of this particular false doctrine? Here it is:

Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. (2:22)

Now this is doctrine. Does doctrine matter? Well it does indeed and this particular thing: 'Who is the liar, but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ?'. You might say, 'But that's theology. What does that matter practically?' Well let me tell you a story. Some years ago in my student days, we were having some public lectures on Christianity in Newmarket in England, and after one of the lectures a man came up to me, I suppose in his middle thirties. He wanted to talk. He wanted to come to God, but he didn't know how and so I invited him to my rooms in college and he came, and his story was this. He had been in the RAF in India, and in India he had read very deeply into yoga and beyond it, into the Indian philosophies.

When he came back, he had gone along to the meetings of the theosophical society in Cambridge. On the airfield where he now worked in civvy street, there was apparently a believer who had been talking to him and he'd got concerned, and he felt he ought to seek God and be saved. And so he went to his mother. She was a nominal Christian, but didn't know the Lord, and she told him not to bother. He was baptised as an infant, so he was saved, and, 'Anyway, there's nothing in these things at all.' And he, not knowing what to do, told me he said the Lord's Prayer. He said he wanted to become a believer, but now he had problems. He did indeed. When he came to my room the first night in Trinity, he looked like an absolute ghost. His chest was heaving and he was panting and I thought the man was going out of his mind. He said, 'I've had a terrible struggle to come up here. I have been overwhelmed that I shouldn't come.' So I sat him down and I tried to pray. That didn't help at all: he got worse. I found that the way to calm him down was to read Scripture.

I read Scripture and, from time to time as he visited me, I brought friends in to visit him. He told me all about these Indian philosophies, and how theosophy was only child's play compared with what he'd been dabbling with in India. He brought me books about theosophy; and theosophy teaches that, of course, the Christ is coming again. All the holy books say that the Christ is coming again, but not Jesus: Jesus is not the Christ. One night, he wanted me to go with him to the theosophers. He was scared to go back to them. He'd borrowed some books but he didn't want to read them, and he daren't take them back on his own. He didn't want to get caught back in this. Would we come with him? So two people, and myself, went with him to the theosophers. Their expert sat up in the corner of a room, a man whose face was more like I imagine Satan's face to be than anybody else I've ever met on the earth. He wouldn't deign to talk to me. He talked in jargon of Indian philosophy.

Before we went, our friend told me about these theosophy people. I said to him, 'Tell me, what did your friends tell you about Jesus? Did they tell you that he is the Christ or he isn't the Christ?' 'Oh, yes, they taught me that Jesus is not the Christ. The Christ is the great world spirit and Jesus lent himself to the Christ. The Christ fills many different great leaders of religion. Jesus isn't the Christ himself. He just lent himself to the Christ.' So I got out the Bible and I said, 'Let me read you this, "Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ".'

Some years ago, we had the *Divine Light Mission* in Belfast. You're too young to remember them! They used to have a lorry and went round Belfast. Their leader was this chap from India, who was the Messiah, until his mother got tired of him and told him to come home, and sent his brother instead—then he was the Messiah! Anyway, it was a

bastard form of Hinduism and they went round the town, and one afternoon a young lady knocked my door and she wanted to witness to me for the Divine Light Mission. She told me she'd been to London and she'd seen the light. I said, 'I've no doubt you have seen the light, my dear. The question is, which light? The Bible says that Satan transforms himself into an angel of light. Which light is it you've seen?'

Well then the man who was leading the team came up and he was getting angry with me and he said, 'That's you evangelicals, you narrow-minded Christians in this province. You think you're the only ones and we believe the same as you do really.'

I said, 'Really?'

'Yes,' he said, 'we believe that Jesus is the Christ. We believe our man is the Christ as well. That's all the difference there is.'

I said, 'You don't believe that Jesus is the Christ, do you?'

'Yes, I do.'

'No, you don't.'

There happened to be two milk bottles standing on my doorstep. I said, 'If you fill both of them with milk, now tell me what you would say, would you say there are two milks there? You wouldn't, would you? There's only one substance. That's milk. It's the same substance, only the milk has filled two bottles.' And I said, 'You don't believe Jesus is the Christ. You believe that the Christ is the great world spirit, like the milk, and that the great world spirit filled Jesus when he was here on earth, and then left him and he's now in the firmament somewhere or other, and the great world spirit has filled your man now. Jesus is one bottle and your man's the other bottle, but the milk is the great world spirit, so that you don't believe that Jesus is the Christ, do you?'

'No,' he said, 'I don't really.'

That's Hinduism and now, as far as I can sense, there is a very big rising tide of mysticism. In the States it is far advanced, where people are searching for the notion of communion with the great world spirit and union with God, mystical seeking after God, and we do need to be warned that there are antichrists. What is the mark of antichrist? 'Whosoever denies that Jesus is the Christ'. Not that he was filled with the Christ. The Christ isn't the Holy Spirit. The Christ in the Bible is an adjective meaning *anointed*. The Christ isn't the Holy Spirit. The Christ is the anointed one: that is Jesus. But the mark of this type of false religion, the antichrist, is that they will talk much about the great world spirit and the Christ, but they refuse to believe that Jesus is the Christ. It's becoming very, very widespread in its different forms.

So if we're in a gospel that talks about fellowship with God and sharing the very life of God, we must be careful. When it comes to having fellowship with God and this whole matter of eternal life, we should be aware that in John's day, it was up against the mystery religions that similarly taught fellowship with God. Only of course, they wouldn't believe that Jesus was the Christ. We are now, in our post-Christian era, up against the kind of mysticism that will freely talk of union with God and fellowship with God, and sharing a life of God and that, 'God is in me. Indeed, I am God.' How do we distinguish? One of the ways we shall distinguish is by the doctrine of the person of Christ so that, far from this being scaremongering or hair-splitting theology, it is an exceedingly practical thing. In our

postmodernist society, it will become ever more relevant to our preaching of the gospel and guarding our fellow believers from these false things.

There is a book that nowadays sometimes you'll find quoted by evangelicals and recommended. It's called *The Cloud of Unknowing*, about how you can come to the vision of God and union with God. You'll find some evangelicals think it is wonderful. It is based on the pagan philosopher Plotinus and is horrific. To make the final leap of fellowship with God, this book would tell you that you have to banish from your mind thoughts of Jesus and his passion. That would interfere with things. If you are prepared to banish him from your mind and thinking at that stage and concentrate, and you want to know God, then you'll see the light and you'll have fellowship with God and be joined with him. That is *The Cloud of Unknowing*, translated by an English monk in the thirteenth century, based eventually on the pagan philosopher Plotinus.

Dear believers nowadays are tired of the superficial evangelicalism of America and television evangelists and easy believe-ism, and they're looking for deeper experience of fellowship with God. That's marvellous, but they do need to be guarded, lest they fall into this kind of thing, such as *The Cloud of Unknowing* stands for, and the modern versions thereof: a mystical experience of God that contradicts the very person of Christ, and is absolutely hostile to him and comes from antichrist direct.

'Who is the liar, but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ?'

About the Author

DAVID W. GOODING is Professor Emeritus of Old Testament Greek at Queen's University, Belfast and a member of the Royal Irish Academy. His international teaching ministry is marked by fresh and careful expositions of both testaments. He has published scholarly studies on the Septuagint and Old Testament narratives, as well as expositions of Luke, John 13–17, Acts, Hebrews and the New Testament's use of the Old Testament.