

The Acts of the Apostles - Part 2

by John Nelson Darby

John Nelson Darby's sermon explores the early church's challenges, the call to repentance, and the pivotal role of the Holy Spirit in spreading the gospel.

Scripture: Acts 3:19

Topics: "The Role of the Holy Spirit", "Repentance"

Description

John Nelson Darby discusses the early church's establishment and the apostles' ministry, particularly focusing on Peter's call for Israel to repent and the implications of Christ's resurrection. He emphasizes the ongoing relationship between God and Israel, the rejection of the apostles by the religious leaders, and the power of the Holy Spirit in unifying believers. Darby also highlights the transition from a Jewish-centric faith to the inclusion of Gentiles, as seen in the ministry of Paul and the significance of the Holy Spirit's work. The sermon concludes with reflections on the challenges faced by the early church and the importance of adhering to the truth amidst opposition.

Transcript

100 Acts 3 - 17

What is striking here is that, after the setting up, in a sense, of the church, and saying "Save yourselves from this untoward generation," Peter then addresses himself to Israel as such, and tells them "Repent ye, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out," not "when" but "so that the times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord." God had raised up His Son Jesus, and now He deals with the nation and that after having called upon them to separate from the nation. God is still dealing with Israel on the ground of Israel. In verse 13 he says "the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers hath glorified His Son Jesus," he goes as far as that.

101The prophets, the covenant, and the fathers are all brought in, in connection with this fulfilment? (Ver. 25.)

Yes. The heavens must receive Him until the times of the restitution of all things; and that is still going on in fact. He proposes to them in this way the return of Christ; and he says, "I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers." But it was supplementary dealing with Israel on the ground of the intercession of Christ, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

But then the apostles are not allowed even to finish their speech, and Israel rejects the supplementary grace; "as they spake unto the people the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, being grieved that they taught the people."

In verse 26 does "raised up" refer to the fact of the Lord's coming amongst the Jews?

I have no doubt it does.

"Sent him to bless you," is that by the ministry of the apostles?

It takes in Christ's life on earth as well.

Is it "God was in Christ reconciling"?

Ah, that is "the world;" here it is, "ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers." This is an address to Israel, when Christ was gone, to say that He would come back again if they repented; as indeed He will when they do repent. But the priests stop their mouths altogether, and tell them that they must not preach; and then they say they must obey God rather than man. The priests let them go, and they go to their own company; but they have got their own company to go to, notice that.

102 Then we get another manifestation of the power of the Holy Ghost and its effect in making them all of one heart and of one mind too. (Acts 5:12.)

Had Peter this in his mind in Acts 2?

No; there it was "Repent and be baptized, every one of you," and "save yourselves from this untoward generation." Here the return of Christ promised on repentance; but Acts 4 is present christian testimony, the other was supplementary grace.

Were they thoroughly given up until the last chapter?

Well, this was outside Jerusalem.

There is no offer that Christ should return after this?

No, not at all.

Would you explain Acts 3:21?

It is what the prophets had stated, that is all. Nothing more is to be restored than they had said should be. In Acts 5 you get evil coming in inside; then you find the power of judgment, and they fall down dead; and fear comes upon all within and without. It was the manifestation of God's presence encouraging His disciples. Ananias and Sapphira were lying to God as in the assembly, and the Lord's presence shewed itself in judgment.

103 Does Peter allude to this when he says judgment begins at the house of God?

No; though it is the same principle. Then comes another character of evil - murmuring about the temporal provisions; and the seven are appointed. An important principle is connected with this, and that is the free action of the Holy Ghost shewn even in Jerusalem, in Stephen, and afterwards in Philip too. It was not

apostles merely bearing witness, but you now see this free action in those who had the serving of tables.

I suppose Judaism was not thoroughly judged until Jerusalem was destroyed?

Well, not externally; but the patience of God still went on with them. You do not get the closing of all that, until the Epistle to the Hebrews and the going outside the camp.

Is the Epistle to the Hebrews supplementary and lingering?

Up to going outside the camp, and then there is no lingering after that.

What is "durst no man join himself to them"?

The people magnified them, heard them gladly, but not the grand folks, it would not do for them. On the contrary, it was they who put the apostles in prison. And then comes something more - angelic power is employed to minister to the heirs of salvation; the Lord sends His angel who opens the prison doors, and the apostles come out and preach as before. That is a wonderful display of power. "Then came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people." And Peter testifies to the council, "We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew, and hanged on tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things, and so is also the Holy Ghost." Then God has providential things ready for them by the hand of Gamaliel. You get our New Testament Joshua here.

104 At what point does the primitive church lose its full power of blessing?

It gradually died down; though you get a point in "I know this that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock." Then comes a question whether the apostles did not fail in staying at Jerusalem, because the Lord had said, "When they persecute you in one city, flee ye to another," and they did not do so.

You never find a church among the Gentiles in such a state of outward attraction as at Jerusalem?

No. But you get here at Jerusalem, Ananias and Sapphira trying to deceive the Holy Ghost; and then the Hellenists murmuring, and so on. Then comes this action of the Holy Ghost in Stephen, preaching and confounding his hearers; and they bring him up to the council.

Murmurings soon came in?

But the murmurings are met by the Spirit of God. First, there is a display of blessedness, everybody giving up what he has; then comes in this murmuring, about it all; and then power by the Holy Ghost to meet that. And power goes on in testimony all the while, and in Acts 7 Stephen is put to death, and that closes that scene. A person is sent to heaven, and that closes up Christ's coming back, because He has got some one gone up there, and that begins another thing entirely. In his speech in chapter 7, Stephen goes through all the dealings of God from Abraham down, from beginning to end, and shews the result as to man. Really the cross had finished everything. Abraham was the beginning of all the dealings of God; there were no dealings before, but a testimony only, not positive institutions or dealings {nor indeed promise to fallen man, though in the judgment on the serpent a revelation of Christ which faith could lay hold of), and that testimony ended with the flood. Then in the beginning of the world, after setting up

authority in it in Noah, when that declined, God calls out a person who thereupon becomes the father of the faithful, he is the father of the race of God, just as you had the father of a wicked race in Adam, but in Abraham you get the root of the olive-tree.

105 Well, Stephen begins there, and gives the whole history of Israel, summing it up with this, they received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it; their fathers persecuted the prophets, and slew those who told before of the coming of the just One; and of Him they themselves had now been the betrayers and the murderers, "ye do always resist the Holy Ghost, as your fathers did, so do ye." You have there the law broken, the prophets killed, Christ crucified, and the Holy Ghost resisted. And so that chapter is the turning-point of Israel's, and indeed of man's history.

What are we to understand by the Lord standing at the right hand of God?

106 I believe He had not sat down to say it was all over with Israel, until they had killed Stephen. It is a figure of the thing. The whole scene is exceedingly beautiful: the stones are flying about Stephen, and he kneels down and prays for those who throw them, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." You see in him the effect of the perception of Christ in glory; Stephen is formed into the same image. The heaven is opened too; it was opened on Christ at His baptism, but then heaven looked down on Him as perfect, here Stephen looks up into heaven. The difference is total as to the person.

Why in Acts 7:2 does Stephen call God "the God of glory"?

That was the natural title as to Israel. And here it is that you first meet Saul. We have been tracing the rejection of the truth, not only in a humbled Christ, but in a continued course of history which is over now, and that is where Saul comes in; he is the expression of the condition of man, who is an open enemy to the very last possible expression of God.

And that is why he calls himself the chief of sinners?

No doubt. Well then, persecution arose and God allowed it. And Philip's service in Samaria follows. Then the offer of Simon Magus to buy the power of giving the Holy Ghost. Philip is a beautiful character of promptness and readiness; he is sent off, when in the full tide of service in Samaria, into the desert; he purchased to himself a good degree and great boldness in the faith.

What was the character of his preaching?

Jesus.

107 How far does that go?

To the eunuch. He explained Isaiah 53. The eunuch asks, "Of whom speaketh the prophet this, of himself or of some other man?" and Philip began at that scripture, it goes on even to the glory, for you get "he shall divide the spoil with the strong."

What is "the kingdom of God" in the Acts?

It was the great truth that the kingdom of God was come now, in the form of the kingdom of heaven.

Would preaching the second coming include the kingdom of God?

It brings it in. Preaching the kingdom is not dealing with the world merely, but it was setting up a kingdom.

What is the meaning of "ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel until the Son of man be come"?

They will not have gone over them until He comes again.

Was Simon's administrative forgiveness when he was baptized?

It was external, and there was nothing real in any part of it; but he had the form of it.

But the judgment of him was not brought out until afterwards?

Just so. He let the truth out when he saw the power working, that he thought it would be a fine thing to have that. And the apostle says, Thy money perish with thee, thou hast no part or lot in the matter.

Are the Samaritans here treated as a separate class?

Rather so.

108 They do not appear to have made the same difficulty about them as they did about the Gentiles?

No, you see the Lord had been in Samaria.

It speaks strongly for the unity that the apostles did not say, They are only Samaritans, let them alone?

In Acts 8:22 he says, "Pray God if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee," what is that?

Possibly he might get forgiven if he bowed to God; it does not exclude him from hope; that is all.

There is something in that word, "his life is taken from the earth;" was it not important at that moment to press that?

That is what he was reading, there was no pressing it more than any other part.

It was going from Jerusalem that this took place?

Yes, he was a proselyte. So now we get Jews, Samaritans, and proselytes, not Gentiles quite. And then we get Saul, the apostle of what brought final judgment on man; by final, I mean, after God had done everything, and Christ was utterly rejected.

And the whole testimony is rejected from the earth.

Yes. And Saul's place is an exceedingly special and peculiar one. Afterwards you get Peter receiving the Gentiles.

What marks Paul's place?

He tells us in Acts 26 "I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness, both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee, delivering thee from the people and from the Gentiles unto whom now I send thee." Paul was neither a Jew nor a Gentile, but taken out of both and connected with Christ in the glory. Sovereign grace had taken out this person, guilty as he was of final hostility - hostility to the very end, and in the moment when he was

occupied in carrying out this violent hostility of man against God, notwithstanding all that God could do in grace, he is taken out, is identified with God's servants, and sent out in service; "delivering thee from" is really "taking thee out of," so that he was neither a Jew nor a Gentile. He did not even know Christ after the flesh. And you get a new truth at Saul's conversation, in "Why persecutest thou me?" "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest:" that is, all the Christians were Christ Himself, in Christ's estimate of them. As you have "so also is Christ." The whole mystery is involved if not developed in that word "Me."

109 How do you understand the Lord's appearing to him?

It was because he was to be a witness for Him.

Did Paul forget this when he said, "I am a pharisee, the son of a pharisee"?

I suppose so. It is not like his counting it all dross and dung at any rate.

Was Paul right in saying, "Is it lawful to scourge a Roman"?

Well, I do not know that there is any objection there.

And at Philippi?

At Philippi he was right; but his using the plea that he was a Roman sent him to Rome.

110 Did you mean just now that Paul was put into any other position than that of a believer in Christ?

No; but he was put into the position of a vessel and witness of the truth specially.

In what peculiar sense was he entirely a heavenly man?

Because he was neither a Jew nor a Gentile, and so totally different from what went before.

Was he more heavenly than any other christian man?

Practically he was; but not as to true position. If I receive Paul's testimony, I get into Paul's place. He is a special vessel of testimony; God might have used other instruments as well, and did, and they preached . . . by the Holy Ghost.

"Filling up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ," what is that?

Paul had his share, and a special share too, of the afflictions of Christ. Christ had to suffer for His love to the church, and so had Paul.

Paul says that by revelation the mystery was made known unto him, but was it not revealed by the Spirit to the "apostles and prophets"?

I do not doubt others had it revealed. But the first time Paul preached, he preached that Jesus was the Son of God; now Peter never preached that once, so far as we get in scripture.

Did the other apostles get their knowledge of the mystery from Paul?

I do not know. Peter knew Paul's writings, and thought some of them hard to be understood. In Galatians "privately" is what Paul communicated to them when alone. We get great truths shewn out in him, and this

remarkably, that sovereign grace takes him up when in the extreme of hostility against Christ, and makes him the instrument of declaring sovereign grace to those who were in that condition themselves. . . . His opposition was a terrible thing; conscience told him he ought to do it, and all the religious authorities told him too; and then he found that he was fighting against the Lord of glory. He found out that all that was right in him (in one sense it was right) had just set him to destroy Christ. It was a complete smash - an utter smash - not of a wicked man at all, but a smash of a man in his most cultivated capacity; and the man was gone too. It was sovereign grace entirely above everything.

111 It seems to have always characterized Paul's ministry - this revelation of the mystery?

Yes. . . . Then as soon as Paul is called, we get back to Peter, with not only the power still going on, but all Lydda and Saron turned to the Lord, and then, though Paul is called the apostle of the Gentiles, Peter is used to bring in the first Gentile.

Why was that?

Because it must all be brought in in unity; if Paul had started apart, then it would have been a Gentile church, as well as a Jewish church, and that would not do at all.

Peter was naturally averse to going to the Gentiles?

Yes. You do not get unity at first, but blessing for Gentiles in itself.

Is this Peter's having the "keys"?

And the Holy Ghost is given them too?

112 After the testimony of a crucified Christ and faith in Him. . . . You must get blood before you get oil, and the oil may come immediately after the blood, as in the case of the leper. When I am cleansed by the blood of Christ, then the Holy Ghost can come and dwell in me.

When you come to understand and know the condition of man, you will find there are no promises belonging to him, any more than righteousness. Wherever you have promises, you will find man in some measure owned. There are no promises to man as man, at least Gentiles have none. That is what I see in the Syrophenician woman, and in what she was brought to own." "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and cast it to the dogs." She acknowledges that is true, but "the dogs eat the crumbs," she says - takes the dog's place, and looks to God's sovereign love to send to those who have no title, and then gets everything she wanted; but as long as she talked about the "Son of David," she got nothing.

What is "the Holy Ghost fell on all"?

Peter says it is the same thing happened to them - the Gentiles - as did to us at the beginning.

In Acts 8:16, it says, "for as yet he was fallen upon none of them"?

That is the Samaritans. And now you have Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles, all made partakers of the Holy Ghost.

Just a word again about the water, and blood, and oil: do you put the washing with water as the new birth?

Yes; then the sprinkling with blood, the remission of sins.

113 And an interval between that and the oil?

There often is.

And an interval between water and blood?

Well, there may be, but not in a general way so much, at least, where Christ is preached. And here the oil is at once: "they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God." Cornelius was a converted man, and now he is more than that, he is "saved" by Peter's word, and the Holy Ghost fell on him.

Was he not a Christian until then?

A person is not entitled to be called a Christian until he has the third thing; "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is not of him."

If we have no promises, what is meant by "all the promises of God are yea and amen in Christ Jesus"? And Peter speaks of - "whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises?"

That is the second Man, "yea and amen in Christ Jesus." And Christians have promises of course. But not the first man - not Gentiles, I said.

What is the meaning of the place being shaken?

It shewed the power in an outward way.

There is no mention of the Holy Ghost in the case of the Ethiopian?

No; but he went on his way rejoicing, and to this day the Abyssinians are half Jews and half Christians.

What of Cornelius himself?

His alms, it says, came up before God, and his prayers; and he was a devout man. He may have heard of Christ, for this thing was not done in a corner; anyway he must have known of Christ, much or little, but he did not know the gospel, as we call it. It is important to see on this question to notice that the word "saved" has a force which is not generally given to it. Take the word "delivered," and then Israel was not delivered until they had passed the Red Sea, they knew they were to be, but were not really.

114 Would you call it a transition state?

You may call it so, or what you please, but they were not saved. Only remember, I do not go and preach about a transition state to a mass of supposed unbelievers. . . . Strictly, salvation is not believed in. Conversion is. Quickening is. But that a person is taken out of the state he is in naturally, in bondage in the flesh, and delivered from it, is not. And that is "saved."

Then what is the difference between conversion and salvation?

Conversion is when a man turns to God, through the Spirit of God working in Him.

What is conviction? Is that there?

It would include that, and be conversion too, if the will is bowed. But salvation is positive deliverance from the state the man is in. The prodigal son was converted when he turned and came to his father; but he had not Christ on him until he had the best robe. He would be glad before if he could but get a corner in the house.

In Acts 11 you get the gospel preached first to the Jews, and then some spoke to the Gentiles. Then Barnabas gets hold of Paul, and that is where the new ministry comes in. The church at Antioch is started.

"As far as Antioch," the distance did not hinder them.

115 Were Grecians Gentiles?

Hellenes were, but Hellenists were not. Here the whole point is that they were Gentiles.

You have faith there before conversion, they "believed and turned to the Lord"?

Yes, you always get belief first in that way. If they did not believe, they could not turn to Him. Then we get persecution and other things. The Lord delivers Peter out of the prison, but Herod cuts off James' head. The first persecution was by the chief priests, but this is a royal persecution. In the dealing with Herod we get the government of God outside the church. This is the end of Peter.

In Acts 13 we start from Antioch. There you get the public testimony with this important element, that they are sent forth by the Holy Ghost. Christ had called Paul, but now you get the immediate action of the Spirit for carrying out his ministry.

Would "ministering to the Lord" be worship?

Partly so, I suppose; partly worshipping and partly praying, they were together before the Lord. It would be like Israel, they kept the charge of the Lord until the cloud was taken up, or came down.

Is there anything special in Saul's name being changed?

Well, I believe he had got among the Gentiles, and Paul is a Latin name

In Acts 13:47 Paul takes Isaiah 49:6 for a command; it is really a prophecy spoken for the Lord.

In Acts 14 "elders" are chosen, and this is the first intimation of that arrangement.

Is it "ordain?"

The word really means choose, but in ecclesiastical Greek, to ordain. Calvin put in the words, "by the advice of the assembly." In chapter 1 the translators put in "ordain," simply from their own views. The etymological meaning of the word, "by show of hands," is quite lost.

116 What about these elders now?

Well, if you want them, you must first get me the church, and then apostles too. In Acts 20 Paul speaks of "the flock of God, over whom the Holy Ghost has made you overseers." If you were to choose elders amongst you now, you would be just a little sect with its own voluntary arrangements. Christ was the source of authority: He appointed apostles, apostles appointed elders. Authority came down, never went up. There is no kind of choosing by the church in that way in scripture. There is scripture for subjection to

those who labour in the word, and so on; that is on moral ground. In Hebrews and Thessalonians you have, "esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake."

But to appoint them needed either an apostle or an apostle's delegate?

Yes.

How do you understand that "from themselves" grievous wolves should arise?

I do not confine that to the elders, though such might come even from them.

In Acts 15 we get the question of what was to be done with the Gentiles - were they to be circumcised?

Antioch and Jerusalem were tending towards a split; now, if Paul had settled it, each would have gone on its own way, and we should have had two churches. God hindered that, and made Jerusalem set the Gentiles free; so keeping up the unity practically. Then, as they went through the cities, they delivered the decrees to them for to keep.

117 There is one verse that I should like to get at the bottom of, and that is, "it seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us." What is the force of that?

I do not know that it is not Cornelius there.

Was it that in the assembly the Holy Ghost spoke?

In verse 25 the Holy Ghost is not mentioned; and in verse 23 you have apostles, elders, and brethren. They were decrees of the apostles and elders. . . . You see the Holy Ghost had let in a Gentile without making him a Jew I see one very wise thing; the apostles let all the brethren tire themselves with discussing, and then they (the apostles) come in lively. James quotes a passage, the scope of which has nothing to say to the matter - one that is in the Septuagint - "that the residue of men might seek after the Lord," but which in the Hebrew is, "that they may possess the remnant of Edom."

What is it quoted for?

For one single word, "the Gentiles, on whom my name is called;" that is all that he quoted it for.

What is the principle of a decree of the council?

Merely that there were certain things they would do right to attend to. There were three things - the proper claims of God; the relationship of man and wife, purity in man; and then, that life belonged to God.

Jews in every city?

Yes, that there are plenty everywhere to plead for Moses. But spiritual intelligence will take up the defence of blood. It is not law only, but before it.

118 Are these binding upon us now?

Not in the shape of a decree now; but it is clear enough as to two of them. As to things offered to idols, if a thing were sold in the shambles I should ask no questions about it.

Paul's higher truth could not abrogate this?

No, certainly not. And as to fornication, in Thessalonians Paul presses the same thing; but it was ingrained in their habits, they were so degraded. Then we get Barnabas and Paul disputing. I do not doubt, after all, God's hand was in it, because Paul had to stand alone in the place he takes up. Barnabas takes Mark. John Mark, was sister's son to Barnabas, and so he was not above connection with nature as Paul was; that was the secret and therefore he would not be a suitable person to be with Paul.

I suppose it is distinct that the Holy Ghost was with Paul?

Yes, but he may have lost his temper about it. It is beautiful to see how, afterwards, he says (2 Tim. 4:11), "Take Mark, and bring him with thee, for he is profitable to me for the ministry."

The brethren recommend Paul to the grace of God?

Yes. He is ordained twice; here, and in Acts 14:26, we read what it meant, "Whence they had been recommended to the grace of God." It was laymen ordaining an apostle, if you take it as ordaining, and done twice over. It is very simple if you really take it as stated; they had what we should call a prayer-meeting about it, and that might be done a dozen times.

119 Would there be any danger in doing it again now?

No; doing it honestly.

What of laying on of hands?

Laying on of hands was always used as a sign of blessing.

In Acts 16 we come to an important principle for evangelists, and that is, that while they are called to preach the gospel to every creature, there is Christ's authority too for being here or there, as He sees fit; while their commission is universal, their direction is particular. Paul was not to go into Asia or Bithynia then (though he was allowed to go into Asia afterwards); but he is directed by a dream, and then says, "assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us." When he comes to Macedonia with Luke, then we get "we" for the first time. And we get the wisdom of God needed to defeat Satan. You see how subtle Satan is; if Paul had accepted this woman's testimony, this Pythoness, he would have accepted the devil; and if he put the spirit out of the Pythoness, then he raised the devil against him. And he does nothing for some time, and then he is stirred in spirit, and cannot help himself. Another thing: though he was very glad to preach in the synagogue, when he comes to Philippi, he goes and sits down by the river side with a number of poor women, and that is the commencement of one of the brightest churches we have in scripture. He does not put out any handbills or such things. He goes to the Jewesses. Lydia was a proselyte. And this was the commencement of the work in Europe.

Why did not Paul cast the evil spirit out at once?

Well, it is evident he avoided meddling with it for many days; at last he cannot stand the pretended co-operation of Satan, and then he arouses, and casts it out.

120 Will Satan co-operate now-a-days?

To be sure he will, if you will let him.

Not in the same manifest way?

Manifest! how so, how manifest then, except to the spiritual perception of the apostle? Many an infidel would come and work with you now, in some respects, if you would let him. It teaches us how important it is to see what we accept in the way of help in God's service.

In Acts 17 it is all Paul's ministry. And then you get him at Athens. Then you have Paul's defence, not sermon, from verse 22. He had preached (v. 18) Jesus and the resurrection.

He preached repentance, and that characterized his gospel preaching?

Only you must not call this preaching. Paul is here brought to Areopagus to answer for himself.

Acts 18-20

This is general history of Paul's service; and we may see how cast on the Lord we are in work. Corinth was a frightful place of luxurious wickedness, and he continued there a year and six months. Then he must by all means keep the feast at Jerusalem, and he goes away, and through Galatia. I suppose at this time the Epistle to the Galatians had hardly been written. You get his first preaching in Acts 16, and now he is confirming the disciples.

121 Is Apollos introduced here for any special purpose?

I do not know, except that he was a very eminent labourer afterwards. He went over to Achaia, so that they could say, "I am of Paul, and I of Apollos," there. Then Paul went to Ephesus, and there was an uproar. We do not know when he went to Crete, though it is supposed that it was when he was at Ephesus. Just after that uproar he wrote the Epistle to the Corinthians; then Titus came back with the answer to the first letter, and Paul wrote the second. It tells us he was three years at Ephesus.

Was this trouble in Asia, what he alludes to in 2 Corinthians?

Yes, only it must have gone further.

It says "disputing?"

Well, it was discussing the things of God; as an old term disputing was used in that way, not with bad feeling.

In chapter 19 we get very distinctly the Holy Ghost consequent upon believing - "Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?" And in Acts 20 he calls the elders of Ephesus, and shews them that all would go thoroughly bad after his decease. "Of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things," etc. It is the religious body that is the spring of persecution; so at last, no doubt, the beast kills people, but the blood of the saints is found at Babylon

What are the chief points in his address to the elders?

There is, first, the gospel of the grace of God; then the kingdom of God, and then the whole counsel of God.

122 What is that last?

It would have special reference to what Paul had to communicate. . . . It was not that man was a moral being, and so on; it was much more objective than subjective; but the effect is to produce the subjective

state, and the subjective state is always formed by an object.

It is not preaching about repentance that produces it?

No; but still you must preach that they repent; and it is repentance towards God too.

That is stated before "faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ?"

But that sentence (Acts 20:21) is abused in a violent way, putting repentance before faith; if it is faith in the full efficacy of Christ's work, of course it can, and will come after repentance; it is impossible that repentance can go before faith, because when a man goes with a testimony, if it is not believed, it produces no effect.

Is not this the first historical notice of the great deflection of the church?

I suppose so. The Epistle to the Thessalonians was written before this; and the second to the Thessalonians was written after Paul left Athens and went to Corinth.

Suppose a person took the ground that this was limited to Ephesus, how would you meet it?

Why, there is nothing about Ephesus in it. Paul is speaking in a general way, "after my decease." And you get the same things in Peter. It is Paul's ministry closing - that is the point.

But is it not fatal to all apostolic succession?

Yes, entirely, so called. But I get apostolic succession in scripture, and that is in the binding and loosing which is conferred on two or three gathered together in Christ's name; and that is the only thing the power is passed on to. But here, in the vulgar sense of apostolic succession, it is positively denied.

123 Do you think that the mystery had been fully revealed to Paul at this time?

I do, because he had written to the Romans before this, and there refers to it. You could scarcely have the whole counsel of God declared without the mystery being in it.

Could you call that view of apostolic succession uninterrupted?

Well, no, not quite, because it must come to "two or three." It is remarkable how literally this has been fulfilled It is given when they are a remnant getting out of an old system. Then the Lord tells them to count the cost, etc.

Ought an evangelist now to preach as Christ preached?

You never get the gospel from Christ at all; you get it practically stated, but His is the gospel of the kingdom.

But you get "salvation," and "go in peace?"

Yes, to one individual, but that is not His preaching about the country.

But the gospel now is the gospel of God?

Yes, it is God's glad tidings.

Is that practically now, "He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life?"

Yes.

Did people who were quickened on earth know Christ's salvation?

124 No, nor the 120; at least Peter, the first of them, did not.

But "thy sins are forgiven thee," to the man?

That was no "gospel" at all; it was administration on earth. I do not understand any effort to shew that the Lord could preach what is our gospel; how could He preach His own death and resurrection for salvation as an accomplished thing? You get some of the truth prophetically, in a way, as to His death, and so on, but that is all.

But you find in Romans 3 that the ground is now established, "to declare, I say, at this time His righteousness?"

Exactly; that is the very thing I am saying. There is no formula or rule as to preaching, but, taking all things together, here Paul characterizes the whole of his preaching by these two words, "repentance" and "faith."

Is "the word of his grace" the written word?

Well, wherever they could get it, this was partly written, but not all; it would be all of it when it came. When you get decay brought out fully in Timothy, then it is, "Continue in the things which thou hast learned, and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them," and "the holy scriptures."

Is it "God," or "the word," that is able to build you up?

I think it is the word of His grace, but it is not without God - I am sure of that.

And no state of ruin can at all hinder the full blessing of that?

No, but on the contrary, it is the state of ruin that throws us entirely upon it. Only, as I said, in Timothy, I must know "of whom" I have learned, and "the scriptures." Cyprian says, if I get a channel choked from a spring, I go back and see if the spring has failed, or if the channel is choked. Chrysostom says of Matthew 24, that flying to the hills and mountains is flying to the scriptures. Not that I know much of the Fathers, for when I began to read them, I found them such trash, I could not go on.

125 How soon was church authority insisted on?

In the second and third centuries; it grew up gradually. It was rather official authorities at first than the church.

Did Paul write the last of all?

John was the last writer, not Paul; all John's writings, so far as known, were after Paul's. There has been a controversy about the date of the Revelation, but, according to the most received evidence, it was thirty years after Paul: at least it was after Paul was killed. That is why the Lord says of John, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee." He was the one who watched over the church until the last. Many

learned Christians have put John's gospel as the last thing written.

What coming did the Lord refer to in that John 21:22?

His own coming again.

Not the destruction of Jerusalem?

The destruction of Jerusalem had nothing to do with Christ's coming; that was the judicial action of setting aside the people on earth. Morally it was done before, so that there was nothing left after that but his return. And the Lord says, Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles shall be fulfilled. I think it is most important to notice that passage in 2 Timothy 3: "In the last days perilous times shall come: men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God, having a form of Godliness, but denying the power thereof; from such turn away." And then he refers Timothy, as we have said, to the things he has learned; and from a child Timothy had known the holy scriptures. John says, "He that knoweth God heareth us, he that is not of God heareth not us; hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error."

126 Then it is by means of the scriptures we are to know the truth?

I do not know how else. You cannot hear them (the writers) so you must read them. The principle of church authority is gone in "the seven churches;" there I am not called to hear what the church says, but I am to listen to what the Spirit judges about the church.

What is "hear the church," Matthew 18:17?

That is the assembly in discipline, not about doctrine at all, or anything of that kind. It is not for teaching - the church does not teach, the church is taught. Teachers teach, apostles teach, and the gifts the Lord has given. Take away this horrid word "church," and say assembly; then how can the assembly teach? I do not know a more mischievous word than that word "church." If the church were teaching, you would have a hundred people talking together.

They say "a teaching body?"

127 Ah, the teaching body of the church, says the Romanist, and that comes to the clergy.

The "pillar and ground of the truth?"

The church confesses the truth, and so is the pillar and ground of the truth, but it does not teach. Suppose I were to say here to Mr. O. "Now I cannot believe you, 'O.' until Mr. B. guarantees what you say." What would that prove? Just this, that I do not believe Mr. O. at all, I should be believing B., not O. And if I do not believe what is in the word until the church says it is right, I do not believe the word at all, but the church . . . I am sure I am very thankful to have been brought up to confide in the word; but if you come to real power, then you never believe in the word, but by its power over your own conscience. I remember a priest saying to me "How do you know that it is the word of God?" And I asked him, suppose I give you a deep gash in your arm, how do you know what I have got in my hand is a knife? The trouble is, such things silence people at the moment, but they do not bow; it shews mere infidelity. How did the woman in

John 4 know that Christ was a prophet, and not merely own that what He said was true? What He said was true, but because it was true, and came to her conscience, she knew that He was a prophet. . . . I quite admit there is external testimony to the word, but I do not believe that gives faith. You get the power of the word in your conscience, and you have the testimony of it there. As for the Apocrypha, in the preface of the Maccabees, the writer says, "I have abridged five books because they were too long." What authority can that carry? And there are numerous "gospels," so called, with horrid stories about Christ's power as a child, so that one says they were obliged to shut Him up, lest He should kill everybody. But you do not find people quarrelling with the Koran as they do with the Bible; it is because it is the word of God that they will not let it alone. They do not quarrel with Homer, or books that have no power of conscience.

128 Does the word ever act on the affections before it acts on conscience?

Oh yes, I quite admit it may.

And the different books of the Bible?

The word is like a dissected map, I do not want proof that it is all there; there it is, and all the parts fit in. The only book, as to external evidence, that you can cast any doubt upon is the Second Epistle of Peter; rather, there is less for that than for any other - not that I have the least doubt about it at all.

Could you give us all idea how the canon of scripture got welded together?

The canon of scripture is nothing to me, and the putting it into canon nothing either. You have the whole thing adapted and fitted in together. There may be more apparent difficulty about the Old Testament than about the New; but if you accept the history at all, then the Lord Jesus and the apostles distinctly recognize the Old Testament.

Are all quoted in the New Testament, as a whole, as well as separately?

Well, if I believe Christ is the Son of God, then I get Him taking a book which, on infidel shewing, is not genuine, and opening their understandings to understand from it things about Himself. You get all in the law, the prophets, and the psalms; they are the three divisions. Then there are a great many moral proofs. Infidels will tell you there is nothing like the life of Christ, and yet they say it is an imposture - a man who set up to be the Son of God, and He was not.

129 But they deny that He said He was the Son of God?

Well, that is not true. Besides, when a man comes and tells me, God ought this, and God ought that, what is that?

People say He was not called Son of God in the synoptic gospels?

He is commonly called Jesus, and Jesus is Jehovah-Saviour; you must get the facts first.

It is said that they read Clement in the churches of old, and Hermas too?

But then I do not admit that the church has authority in that. As for Hermas, what is the account you get there? It is that God took counsel with His Son, and with the holy angels, to put a pure spirit into a body, and then sent His servant - Christ - to set up stakes, and stake out a vineyard, &c., that is, apostles, and so on, in the church; but he did a great deal more than he was told, for he set to work to pull up the weeds,

that is, take away their sins; and then God takes counsel with His Son, the Holy Ghost, His angels, what shall we do to Him for this, and they agree to make Him a joint-heir with the Son. Now, if the church authenticated that, then I get the epistle is authenticated, but the church itself unauthenticated. Origen said that that thing of Hermas I have quoted was inspired, but that does not make it inspired. Irenaeus too.

130 What about the Book of Jasher?

The Book of Jasher was not inspired; but the king says to Ammon, "Go and look at that record, and see if this country is not ours."

I suppose there is no doubt that it was Saturday night when the disciples came together to break bread?

. . . . Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty.

In Acts 2 they broke bread from house to house?

Not from one house to another, but at home.

Is that the Lord's supper?

Yes. Then we get general facts as to Paul going up to Jerusalem.

In Acts 20:11, is that the love feast?

I do not know; but they used to have it generally.

Was it breaking of bread on board the ship?

No, not on board the ship.

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