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Prayer Meeting address by Mr. J. Delves at "Ebenezer", Clapham, on  
Saturday evening March 8th., 1952

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Reading: 2 Corinthians 4

The Apostle in this chapter appears to be led by the Spirit of God to distinguish between Law and Gospel, between what is of the Law and what is of the Spirit, between the ministration of condemnation and the ministration of justification; showing that, although there be a glory in the Law, seeing that the character of God is revealed in it, there is a far greater glory in the Gospel, which so to speak eclipses the former glory. Upon this ground he affirms that he and others found great comfort in their afflictions, in the trials and sorrows through which they passed, and that even in the experiences they were greatly strengthened and encouraged by the prospect of eternal life and immortal glory, so that though "in this tabernacle", as he says in the following chapter, "we groan, being burdened", yet in that eternal habitation, that "house not made with hands" there will be no groaning, trouble, sorrow or affliction. When our decease comes, that is if we are indeed found among the people of God, it will be "absent from the body, present with the Lord."

In this chapter particularly he speaks of having received the ministry, and of what that ministry (that is, of course, the doctrine involved in it) did for him. It may be observed in reading the chapter, it did three things particularly. In the first place it sustained him, for in the first verse he says, "Seeing we have received this ministry, having obtained mercy we faint not" and in verse 16 "For which cause we faint not, but though our outward man perish yet the inward man is renewed day by day." It is very confirming to observe in the chapter how things were balanced, or how the Apostle was supported under what would otherwise be overwhelming. He says, "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, yet not in despair, persecuted but not forsaken cast down, but not destroyed." What else could it be but the sustaining power of truth in his soul that upheld him and kept him from fainting and enabled him to continue in such extreme conditions? What a mercy for us if we have a religion where we are favoured to

prove in and under adverse conditions, trials or afflictions, a balancing, so to speak, that is a supporting power that holds us up, sustains us and carries us along. So in an earlier chapter, the Apostle says, "As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolations abound by Christ". That is where the secret lies. So although the Apostle was troubled on every side, he was not distressed. This was the secret - as his sufferings abounded so his consolations abounded likewise. Not that we can always claim an even proportion, because we are subject to such changes, often sinking very low, and sometimes rising a little in faith and hope. But however low we sink, there is yet a foundation through which we can never fall.

But not only did it thus sustain him, but it also sanctified him, which it will ever do where this upholding in a gracious way is in one's experience. "Having received this ministry", he said, "we faint not, having renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." If the Gospel rules us, that is to say if it is a power in us, rising over self and sin, it cannot be other than a sanctifying power as it is a saving power.

But not only did it sanctify him, it enlightened him. Light has shone into the dear man's soul, and light has shone into some of your souls. "In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believed not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." What an awful darkness that is! But he says, "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Here he plunges into the pith and marrow of a real experience, a heavenly light shining in a dark place, the dark place of a man's soul. Yet what a revelation! What glory is in it! May the Lord grant it to you and to me and may He give us a spirit of grace and of supplication.