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Preface

Wisdom is something we do not naturally possess. It is something we must have for salvation. It is something we can never naturally possess. Wisdom is divine education, spiritual training; the learning, absorbing and practicing of eternal truth. It is a full-time occupation, a life-time job.

Wisdom is spiritual-mindedness. Paul's beautiful discourse on divine wisdom at the beginning of 1st Corinthians states "The natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God, for they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual discerneth all things." Wisdom is knowing and doing that which is for the best; living in harmony with eternal facts. The Bible says all others are fools.

Wisdom is wanting to stand right out in the bright light of the Spirit's revelation and thoroughly examine ourselves—within and without—by it; then striving to eliminate all that is out of harmony with God, and develop what pleases Him.

Wisdom is the examining of every act and activity and asking, has this any eternal value? Does it help in the way of life? Could I be doing something more profitable, more spiritually beneficial, more pleasing to God? Could I be doing something more mature, less juvenile?

The Scriptures continually contrast wisdom with folly, saying that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness. They make it clear that naturally we have no wisdom. Our natural condition is folly and ignorance, regardless of how well educated in worldly knowledge. There are many scriptural words translated "fool" and "folly," indicating different aspects of foolishness. The original meanings are; perverse, wilful, boaster, self-confident, empty, senseless, thoughtless, unwise, witless, dull.

Only one path leads to life. All other activities lead to death. Therefore, it alone is wisdom. And anything in life that does not contribute to this one purpose is folly—stupidity—idiocy; no word is too strong, the issues are so great! It will help us finally if we will honestly give our every action its proper label. Classification is the beginning of Order. Face the facts. Face the Light. We may still do it, but let us at least, frankly, face the facts and label it clearly as wisdom or folly, according to whether it contributes to godliness or not. It is of utmost importance—yea, it is absolutely vital—that we perceive the

clear distinction between true wisdom—the wisdom of God—and every aspect of that which the world considers wisdom. They are not only different, they are completely incompatible—diametric opposites, like light and darkness. They ARE Light and Darkness. All throughout Scripture, the thoughts of natural man are described as false, foolish, vain: "It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps aright" (Jer. 10:23). And "directing the steps aright" is the very essence of wisdom.

> *"I beseech you therefore brethren, be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God"* (Rom. 12:2).

—G. V. Growcott

The above quotations reflect the nature of the articles which have been selected from the many which bro. Growcott has written. They contain an urgent appeal to the servants of God that they heed His message to prepare for the coming of His Son, Jesus Christ. In the spirit of this Word our brother, daily conscious of this loving warning, wrote from his heart, of the wisdom, the transcendent height, depth, and transforming power of all the divine utterances.

He has shared this clear understanding with all who take the time to meditate on what he has found. He wrote from the words of the Prophets, Christ and the Apostles, with the object of helping to make ready a people prepared for the coming of the Lord. His words present deep insight into Scripture, giving us further confidence in our hope of salvation. By this collection many who have heard and read them in the past will have a ready reference for this labor of love; and a new generation may also share in this blessing, while waiting for the Master's return.

—E. F. Higham

The Bond of Perfectness

"Whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" (1 Jn. 3:17).

For acceptable walk in the Truth, and for ecclesial health and harmony and a state of true mutual spiritual joyfulness to which we as the sons and daughters of God are freely invited, it is necessary that the Spirit's teachings on the subject of love be continually and repeatedly presented before the mind.

The love which the Scriptures present to us as the fundamental characteristic of godliness is not a natural thing. It is contrary to all that is natural. It is purely a spiritual thing. It is a divine, transforming, unearthly principle of life.

It is a power and force that overcomes and subdues all that is natural. It is the "bond of perfectness"—the bond—the binding together—the uniting, the unifying power of perfection—unity of perfection—perfect oneness—based upon the only possible basis for perfect oneness—an enthusiastic mutual striving toward perfection.

Any aim short of perfection is not unifying, but dividing and breaking up. *No group can have true unity unless it is wholly and wholeheartedly dedicated to the pursuit of divine perfection.*

* * *

And Love is the "bond of perfectness." Unless we as a group mutually possess this bond together, we might as well go our separate ways—because we shall never have any true ecclesial unity or spiritual life without it.

Let us face this basic fact of ecclesial life. If we are not prepared as a whole body to love each other with a pure heart fervently, then our assembling together is utterly meaningless; we are just another poor little lost group among millions of others. It is worse than meaningless—it is a sad, pitiful delusion—destined only to failure.

The Body of Christ is not a lot of little isolated individual compartments. It is not a limited association merely for form and convenience—it is one intimate, closely-knit intensely interdependent unity—

> *"By one Spirit are we all baptized into one Body."*
>
> *"The eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of thee."*

"God hath tempered the body together . . . that the members should have the same care one for another."

These are Paul's remarks toward the end of 1st Corinthians 12, where he is leading up to the revelation of the "more excellent way" of love so beautifully delineated in chapter 13.

The Scriptures are very specific about what this love is of which he speaks—what are the evidences of its presence or absence among us.

It is a terribly sad fact that many accept the Truth and spend their whole life in it—often very actively—without ever perceiving this basic first principle of godliness.

* * *

It is always more profitable, wherever it is possible, to allow our train of thought and meditation to be shaped and guided by some specific portion of Scripture, for there is never any better, or more powerful, or more effective, way of presenting a subject than the way God Himself presents it in His holy Word.

The principle of love is very prominent all through the Scriptures. As Jesus points out, the two greatest commandments of the Law concern love, and furthermore, he says that love is the fulfilling of the whole Law—that all the Law hangs upon these commandments concerning love.

Love is the declared basis of all God's dealings with Israel, throughout both the Old Testament and the New.

But when we think of a specific portion of Scripture in relation to this subject, we naturally turn to the first Epistle of John.

John's words throughout are beautiful and sublime. If we could continually live in their atmosphere, it would cleanse and purge us of all fleshliness and earthiness.

John's first use of the word "love" in this epistle emphasizes a truth which it is essential to make clear at the outset—that love in the true, scriptural sense is not the flabby, shapeless, foggy sentimentalism as presented by the churches of the world, but a *clear, precise, careful adherence to specific divine instructions* based upon a pure zeal and affection for God.

Love is not something contrary to law and command, but rather that which gives all divine law its power and purpose and life and meaning and beauty (1 Jn. 2:4-5)—

"He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar . . . but whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected."

This expression, "the love of God," involves more than either our love for God or God's love for us—it implies the love that appertains to God—that divine, spiritual, mutual relationship between God and the child of God. For love to be perfected, it must be a mutual, reciprocating love.

The keeping (that is obeying) of the Word is the only path to the perfecting of the divine relationship.

In verses 7 to 9 he speaks of the new commandment which was not a new commandment, but which was the same from the beginning.

Jesus said, speaking to his disciples during the last evening before the crucifixion—

> *"A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another."*
>
> *"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."*

He gives this command special emphasis in circumstances, too, that add to its weight and importance.

We may ask ourselves: *Are we Jesus' disciples?* He said this could clearly be determined from whether we manifest love for one another in the special, spiritual way he describes.

Brotherly love was an *old* commandment in that, as Jesus pointed out as regard the Law, it was at the heart and root of all commandments.

It was a *new* commandment in that it was the foundation of the new man, the new birth, the new and living way, the new creation, the new Name, the new covenant, the new Jerusalem, the new heaven, and new earth. It was new in the depth and beauty which his own example gave it—

> *"As I have loved you . . ."*
>
> *"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."*

* * *

Before John goes further into the subject of love, he speaks of what must not be loved—verses 15 to17 of the first epistle (ch. 2)—

> *"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world."*
>
> *"If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."*

These are serious words, and we do well to ponder them deeply, and honestly test ourselves by them. We all desire eternal life. We all recognize the great desirability of God's favor and blessing and acceptance.

Let us then have the wisdom to face and accept this clear instruction in the way of life. It is very small and unworthy and childish to want to have it both ways.

What are the "things of the world" we cannot love if we truly love God—if we truly understand what the love of God means? They are its honors, associations, activities, pleasures and amusements. The world is pressing in on us during all our waking hours—seeking our love and attention and interest. It takes a deep and strong comprehension of the love of God to withstand and hold firm.

> *"For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world."*
>
> *"And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."*

There is the great contrast between life and death.

John is about to tell us of the life-giving joys and glories of divine love, and he must clear the ground first. He must make the issue crystal clear. He must leave no misunderstanding about the fact that we must put away all interest, desire, and affection for the things of the world if we want to be part of the glorious company that are united in the unspeakable joys of the love of God.

In the remainder of chapter 2 he speaks of the unfaithful ones who had not remained steadfast to the love of God. He speaks of the promise of eternal life and urges them not to be drawn away but to hold fast to what they had received and faithfully abide in him.

* * *

Then, beginning chapter 3 he returns to the subject of love—

> *"Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God!"*

It is fitting that he should begin there for, as he tells us, the love of God for man is the root and well-spring of all our love for God and for each other. It is the motive and force behind all love.

God's love for man, as supremely manifested in His only begotten Son, is the transforming power and incentive of all holiness and righteousness—

> *"We are more than conquerors through him that loved us"* (Rom. 8:37).
>
> *"The life I now live, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loves me and gave himself for me"* (Gal. 2:20).

"The love of Christ constraineth us" (2 Cor. 5:14).
"We love, because He first loved us" (1 Jn. 4:19).

* * *

Beginning chapter 3, and arising from the thought of this marvelous manifestation of God's love in calling us, as weak, erring mortals, to be His children in glory, the apostle stresses how this hope and promise must lead us to holiness, how out of place and out of harmony any worldliness or ungodliness is with this divine relationship.

Then he says (v. 10)—

> *"In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil."*
>
> *"Whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother."*

Any ill feeling to any of our brethren cuts us off from relationship to God.

> *"For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another."*

We notice that he divides all mankind into two relationships—the children of God and the children of the Devil.

This is a very sobering thought—if we are not one, we are the other. There are no neutrals—we are either of the Seed of the Woman—that is, of Christ in harmony with the mind of Christ, or we are of the Seed of the Serpent.

And he gives two identifications of the children of God—

1. *Doing righteousness.*
2. *Loving his brother.*

Let us try to fully realize the prominent and vital place this matter of loving our brethren is given in the commands of God. We find that John returns to it again and again.

Let us closely follow his thought here as he continues (v. 14)—

> *"We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren."*

Here is a simple, but deeply searching test that we can each apply to ourselves, to see if we really have passed from death to life—to see if we really are "in the faith," or just living a lie.

Do we find ourselves powerfully moved and motivated by love, kindness, concern, gentleness, sympathy, patience, and desire to render comfort and service to all our brethren? Not just a limited few who happen to please us and appeal to us, but to all—especially to those who seem least lovable—these are the ones most in need of patience and guidance and brotherly kindness.

If this is not honestly true of us, then we must face the implication of John's searching words—we have not passed from death to life—we are not "in Christ"—we are not "in the faith"— we have not properly learned the Gospel—we have not entered the divine family—we are still "children of the devil," for John continues in this 14th verse—

"He that loveth not his brother ABIDETH IN DEATH."

He says in verse 16—

"Hereby perceive we love, because He laid down his life for us."

As other versions put it—

"By this we know love," or "From this we learn what love is"—"that he laid down his life for us."

When the Scriptures speak of love, they do not mean some puny little part-time hobby. Love in the scriptural sense is a tremendous, all-consuming passion for goodness and service to others—and if we haven't got it we are not the children of God. John goes on—

"And we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."

Not just be willing to face death for them in some very unlikely far-off emergency—but give our whole PRESENT lives for them.

The next verse should be imperishably engraved on our hearts. It carries the seeds of a deeper, broader, more world-shaking revolution than this planet has ever yet seen—

"Whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion, how dwelleth the love of God in him?"

It is for each alone to search his heart and, as standing in the presence of God, to decide just what, and how much, that statement means to him, remembering that it is impossible to obey it too much, but fatally easy to obey it too little.

"WHOSO HATH THIS WORLD'S GOODS, AND SEETH HIS BROTHER HAVE NEED—HOW DWELLETH THE LOVE OF GOD IN HIM?"

And let us remember that the Scriptures are not speaking of little, conscience-salving, token handouts, but on the large scale of the love of Jesus—

"Love one another, as I have loved you."

Are we BIG enough to be children of God, or are these teachings too vast and noble for our petty, selfish, earthy natures to rise to?

John presses the point further—

"My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth" (v. 18).

There is much—SO much—talk about love, but where shall we find that life-giving, self-sacrificing love of which John speaks as essential to salvation? Is it the rule among us? Are we the children of God, or is our "love" that of word and tongue, such kind words of sympathy—

"Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled—we are so sorry to hear of your trouble, we hope everything will be all right. We'll come and see you again."

What a noble feeling it gives us to be so kind and sympathetic "in tongue and word!"

"Let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth."

There is a terrible reckoning in store on the matter of selfishness and unfaithful stewardship.

* * *

It would be profitable at this point to give some thought to just what the Scriptures mean by love. For that, 1st Corinthians 13 is the most informative. Paul tells us there in detail just how true love acts, so that *by comparing ourselves with what he says, we can easily determine whether or not we are really children of God, and on the way of life.*

After saying, with the strongest possible emphasis, that no other service or sacrifice is of any value in the absence of this scriptural love, Paul says—

"Love is long-suffering."

Long-suffering means long and patient endurance of offense. Long continued gentleness in the face of provocation. Why? Because love desires only good.

Love is saddened by the failure of others to manifest goodness, but it has the divine wisdom to realize that only by infinite patience can good be accomplished, and yielding to impatience is failure and defeat.

This word "long-suffering" carries the sense of a tremendous power of self-restraint and self-control—more powerful than the natural passions of anger and impatience. Love is—first and foremost—long-suffering.

When we find ourselves becoming angry or impatient or annoyed, that is the danger signal—the time to stop and examine our hearts, and seek the help of God to overcome, for it is a sign that the diabolos is forging another link in the chain of our bondage to sin and death, and only the power of God can break that fatal chain.

"Love is kind."

"Kind" means having a consistent disposition to do good and confer happiness and to avoid anything that offends or creates unhappiness. Kind is the opposite of harsh, stern, unfeeling or selfish.

No one who is kind in the scriptural sense can be any of these things. Kindness often has to be firm, but it is never harsh or bitter or rough or rude.

No one who manifests these opposites of kindness is kind according to the divine definition, and they do not, therefore, have the love without which, Paul says, all else is useless, and they are not, therefore, children of God.

These two characteristics, then, are the two main pillars of spiritual love—long-suffering and kindness, not just as surface efforts, and on certain occasions, but consistently manifested under all circumstances as the deepest and strongest motives of life.

Let us stand along side of the Scriptural standard and see what our actual stature is.

The apostle continues—

"Love envieth not."

Love desires nothing that others have, but is completely satisfied and content with the infinite riches of the grace of God. Knowing that if a man truly has that, he has everything for all eternity, and there is nothing more to have—nothing more to be desired.

"Love vaunteth not itself."

It does not boast or seek notice or attention. It does not seek gratification through the manifestation of its abilities or knowledge or accomplishments.

It is not always relating little incidents or circumstances of which it is the hero or center of attention.

With divine wisdom it sees through the pitiful childishness of seeking to impress others, which is at the root of a vast proportion of all human conduct.

"Love is not puffed up."

It is free, not only from outward show, but also from inward pride. To be pleased and satisfied with ourselves is the most disastrous form of self-deception. Love knows that all mankind is weak and ignorant and helpless, and all good is solely of the grace of God. Jesus said—

"Why callest thou me good?"

"Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly."

"I can of mine own self do nothing."

If that was the mind of Christ, what room is there for any self-approval in the sin-stricken sons of men? The love of which Paul speaks as vital to salvation is no small or common thing.

"Love doth not behave itself unseemly."

Love does not act out of harmony with the holiness of its relationship to God—does not speak foolishly according to the sudden impulses of the flesh. Love is *always* gentle and gracious and courteous and well-behaved—nothing silly, or changeable, or erratic, or coarse, or rude.

"Love seeketh not her own."

Her own *what?* Her own *ANYTHING.* Her own way, her own desires, her own rights, her own advantage, her own comfort, her own honor. LOVE DOES NOT SEEK AT ALL, BUT GIVES.

Love's great secret is the knowledge that all true, worthwhile pleasure is in giving, not seeking. There is no real satisfaction in seeking and accumulating, but only disappointment and frustration in the end.

But giving, whether it be goods, or labor, or time, or the foregoing or yielding of any advantage, is deeply satisfying and rewarding and uplifting and ennobling. It is getting closer to God, and the way He operates, and that always yields pleasure and blessing and satisfaction.

"Love is not easily provoked."

The insertion of this word "easily" by the translators is utterly unwarranted, and takes all the power out of the expression. All other versions correct this. The true translation is, as the Revised Version has it—

"Love is not provoked."

When we say "I am provoked," or "That is provoking," we are actually saying, "I do not love; I am permitting the flesh to rule, and not the Spirit; I am not big enough to be on God's side."

If we examine ourselves by the light of God's Spirit-Word, we shall often find that in our fleshly, self-assertion we are declaring our own condemnation, and glorying in our shame. Let us think of this before we blurt out our feelings.

David, in Psalm 119, states this same searching truth that "Love is not provoked," and, therefore, if we are provoked we have not found the power of love without which all else is hopeless. He says—

"Great peace have they which love Thy law: and NOTHING shall offend them."

"Love thinketh no evil."

The Revised Version gives the meaning more clearly—"Love taketh no account of evil." That is, "overlooks it, does not impute it, bears no resentment." Literally, it is—"Love reckoneth not the evil"—passes it by, makes loving allowances, "Love shall cover a multitude of sins."

All these tests of love are deep and searching, but this is one of the deepest. No ecclesia can be a true, joyous ecclesia of God where this loving passing over of evil is not practiced.

It does not mean *condoning* of evil—never that. The Scriptures are very clear on that point. The Truth must be defended, both in doctrine and in precept, but the reference here is to personal reaction to personal injury—the attitude love takes toward the offender—

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

In chapter 5, John expresses a very important principle in this respect—one which we do not fully realize the importance and power of (v. 16)—

"If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and He shall give him life for them that sin not unto death."

Therefore, when others injure us, or we see them doing things that grieve us as not in harmony with the Truth, we have a great responsibility, for *their salvation may be in our hands,* in the power of prayer. This is how love—instead of spreading a matter or taking offense, or causing agitation and trouble—may cover a multitude of sins and save a sinner from the error of his way. Nothing can stand before the invincible power of righteous prayer.

"Love rejoiceth not in iniquity."

Love enjoys no gossip—gets no satisfaction out of the trouble or suffering of others, even when it is deserved. Love can have no part in any unfairness or injustice or discrimination—gets no enjoyment from anything unclean or unrighteous or unholy.

"But rejoiceth with the Truth."

All love's allegiance and pleasure and rejoicing are on the side of the Truth.

In all our emphasis on love, we must never forget that it must always be grounded on and in the Truth. Love is the power of life, but Truth, and Truth alone, must be in its form and shape.

All these beautiful qualities of love, exercised outside the divine framework of the Truth, lose all their beauty and divinity, and become mere whims of the flesh. Divine love is

always "rejoicing in—*within*—the Truth," and never wanders outside of it—anything masquerading under the guise of love, that is out of harmony with Truth, is a deceiving counterfeit.

"Love beareth all things."

The word for "beareth" means to contain, to hold in, to be watertight. Love is strong enough to hold in and contain all other emotions and desires, and love is the only power that can. Apart from this power—which arises, as John says, from prolonged contemplation upon the love that God has freely manifested to man—apart from this power, the control of the flesh according to the will of God is utterly hopeless.

But love *can* contain and restrain all things. The word means to keep out as well as to keep in. Love is an impervious shield and protection against all destructive, misleading or contaminating influences from without.

"Love believeth all things."

What are the "all things" that love believes, and is it particularly a virtue to "believe all things?"

Love's infinite capacity for belief of good is one of its greatest beauties—belief in God and belief in the capabilities and possibilities of man with the help of God.

James says the wisdom from above is easy to be entreated, or, literally, "easily persuaded." It takes a tremendous power of belief to truly forgive seventy times seven and wholeheartedly mean it. There is nothing cynical or pessimistic or sour about love—it is always willing to believe the best, and give the benefit of every doubt.

To the wisdom of the world, this is gullibility and stupidity, but love will be found in the end to have been the wiser way when all the wise of the world are exposed in the pitiful nakedness of their foolishness.

"Love hopeth all things."

Love comprehends all hope, as it does all belief, or faith. Love never gets discouraged, never gives up hope, regardless of circumstances or appearances. It is clear from the general trend and direction of the apostle's remarks that the hope he has in mind is hope for, and in regard to, others. He is speaking of love as a relationship—as a way of conduct and attitude toward others.

Love never gives up trying and hoping—is never soured or embittered by failure or rebuff.

"Love endureth all things."

The word means to stand firm, to be unshaken and unmoved in the face of difficulty, attack or hardship.

Finally—

"Love never fails."

It never wears out, never dies, never comes to an end. The apostle points out that this is the only human attribute that carries over into eternity. If we have this, we shall endure. Lacking this, we pass away with the perishing world.

* * *

We turn again to John's epistle, and read again the words at which we left it (3:18)—

"My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth."

And he continues—

"And hereby—by this—we know that we are of the Truth, and shall assure our hearts before him."

—that is, IF we are living and rejoicing in this divine love which the apostle has so beautifully described.

John goes on—

"For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things."

Do our hearts condemn us as we measure ourselves by this one and only way of life?

"And this is His commandment, That we should believe on the Name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as He gave us commandment" (v. 23).

Nearly twenty times in this epistle this same command is emphasized—that we MUST love one another. It is the key and theme of the whole epistle.

* * *

After warning against false teachers in the early part of chapter 4, he returns to the same theme (v. 7)—

"Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God: and everyone that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God."

When we consider all that is involved in the love of which he speaks, we can well realize that we must be born of God to be able to manifest it, and that to achieve this love is truly to know God. And it further follows (v. 8)—

"He that loveth not knoweth not God, for God is love."

Now Jesus said that to know God is life eternal, so the implication is clear that the achievement of this love of which Paul speaks is a necessary step to obtain eternal life.

"GOD IS LOVE."

Here he reaches the heart of his subject. God is not just loving, but He is LOVE ITSELF—That is His essential nature and personality. As we shape ourselves to this divine ideal of love, we make ourselves one with God—we conform ourselves to, and lay hold on, eternity.

> *"Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins"* (v. 10).

Love does not originate with us. It was not in return for our love that God sent His Son. All the love originated with Him, while we were yet loveless sinners.

He did not wait till we were lovable before He put His redeeming love into action on our behalf. Nor does He withdraw the offer and manifestation of His love because we continually fail and disappoint Him in our reciprocation of it. This gives force to the exhortation that follows (v. 11)—

> *"Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another."*

Love is needed most where it is at first undeserved and appreciated least. God set His infinite love in motion toward the ungodly in order to create and kindle love in them. If, then, we are to follow God's example and be God's children we can never justify not loving by the fact that the recipient is not lovable, for that is all the more reason for giving him our love.

> *"No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and His love is perfected in us"* (v. 12).

Here is a powerful promise and incentive indeed! We cannot see God. He is unapproachable. But if we love one another, God dwells in us. He will draw near. He will make His comfort and His presence felt. He will work in us to will and to do of His good pleasure, and He will perfect His love in us, so that we are one with Him.

Again the apostle repeats the glorious revelation and promise (v. 16)—

> *"God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him."*

Love is the meeting place, the sphere of communion and communication.

> *"Herein"*—(that is, in this way, through this divine bond)—*"is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness*—(that is—confidence, assurance, freedom from fear)—*in the day of judgment, because as He is, so are we in this world"* (v. 17).

Are we, by this oneness of love, as He is in this world?—for that alone can be the ground of confidence.

He has shown us clearly what *HE* is—God is *LOVE*—infinite love—an endless, inexhaustible fountain of love, seeking to bring blessing wherever it flows.

"There is no fear in love, but perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath torment"—(v. 18).

"He that feareth is not made perfect in love."

"Perfect love casteth out fear." Surely this is the deepest and most beautiful statement in all Scripture!

The world lives in fear. Its whole framework is based on mutual fear. It has always been so, but especially today. The special mark of the last days is—

"All men's hearts failing for fear."

There exist today the two greatest human powers that the world has ever seen, and they live in mortal fear of each other.

But fear goes deeper than international problems. Fear is at the root of all human life, and much of man's efforts and contrivance is motivated by it.

Fear is a terrible, destroying thing. It is a weakness of the flesh that robs us of so much comfort and joy. How often the Scriptures remind us that all is in the all-powerful hand of God, and exhorts us to "Fear Not!"—

"Fear not, Abram."

"Hagar, fear not!"

"Moses said unto the people, Fear not!" (Ex. 20:20).

"Fear not, neither be discouraged" (Deut. 1:21).

"God will not fail thee; fear not, neither be dismayed" (Deut. 31:8).

And so the endless chain of divine assurance could be extended throughout the Scriptures. Twelve times we find these words in Isaiah alone, as in chapter 43, verse 5—

"Fear not, for I am with thee!"

The Psalms express the confidence of the godly man—

"I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me" (23:4).

"God is our Refuge and Strength, a very present Help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear though the earth be removed" (46:1-2).

And so throughout the New Testament also: "Fear not, Joseph," "Fear not, Mary," "Fear not, Simon," "Fear not, Paul." And the first words of the Son of Man similitude to John were (Rev. 1:17), "Fear not."

The Scriptures go right to the heart of the problem in declaring that the sacrifice of Jesus was to—

"Deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage"

—the bondage and sorrow in which the creation groans.

Sin and death are the root of all fear. But—

"Perfect love casteth out all fear. He that feareth is not made perfect in love."

This is love's greatest beauty and blessing. Only God can bestow this glorious freedom from all fear and He will bestow it upon those, and those alone, who dedicate their lives to the love of Him and of their brethren.

"We love, because he first loved us" (v. 19).

All love must grow from the ever expanding realization of the glory of the infinite love of God—God's desire to draw near and to bestow good.

"If a man say, I love God: and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" (v. 20).

What is the point? Why cannot we love God if we do not love men?

When we understand this, we understand the nature of true spiritual love. That love does not go out in limited beams, there is nothing limited about it—it is a universial irradiation. It is not a limited attribute—it must be the whole fibre of our character. If our love is not shining upon and blessing all who are close to us—all with whom we come in contact, how do we expect it to be real and strong enough to reach God?

Furthermore, we have no direct contact with God. We can only manifest our professed love for Him by obedience to Him in relation to things that are close to us.

"And this is the commandment we have from Him, that He who loveth God, love his brother also" (v. 21).

By this, then, we shall stand or fall in the great day of judgment—by the extent to which we comprehend and manifest the beauty of divine love toward all, in all our daily relationships, and especially our ecclesial relationships.

If we are too small and selfish and touchy and self-centered to love all our brethren according to the divine pattern, we are of no use in the great, eternal purpose of God. For God IS love.

By Love Serve One Another

We are reading together Paul's epistle to the Galatians. It is a very interesting epistle. Indeed, all the epistles are interesting, but it may be thought that Galatians is not interesting because it deals with a problem that we are very unlikely to be concerned with—whether we should keep the Law of Moses.

But this error, which it was written to combat, is merely the primary background for an interesting record concerning Paul himself, and a beautiful, positive exposition that goes far beyond the problem itself.

The Galatians were in south-central Asia Minor, the turning around point of Paul's first missionary journey, including the cities of Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. Actually, Derbe was only 125 miles from Paul's original home of Tarsus, on the main east-west Roman road, but there was a mountain range in between, and not much general intercourse.

The date of the epistle, and its time-position in relation to Paul's travels, is not certain, but it appears to be early, and some consider it his first epistle. It was certainly after his first visit to them (Acts 14), and seems to be before the Jerusalem council (Acts 15), though this is not certain. If it was, it would be during the "long time" at Antioch of Acts 14:28.

It has six chapters, and is divided into three clear parts: *chapters 1-2:* Paul's establishment of his direct divine "call" and "authority" completely independent of the apostles of Jerusalem, but in full "harmony" and "agreement" with them; *chapters 3-4:* expository, the relation of the Law of Moses to the Abrahamic promises and the dispensation of grace and faith; *chapters 5-6:* exhortation, the total life of complete "transformation" and "dedication" and "purity" and "love" and "self-sacrifice" and "service" that must follow our redemption in Christ, or else faith is only a hypocritical, still-born abortion.

These three sections necessarily run into each other a little, and overlap, but the general distinction is quite clear.

Unlike his other epistles, when he has a warm personal greeting, and words of commendation, even when he has a message of censure, Paul here starts right out with the burden of his reproof—

> *"Paul, an apostle, not FROM men, nor even THROUGH men"* (1:1).

That was the issue; that was what they questioned, and that is what the first two chapters establish. He was in no sense a

messenger from the other apostles, nor even had he obtained any of his instruction and understanding through them. Both his "call" and his "doctrine" were direct from Christ himself and God. It is vital that he establish this, for clearly the Judaizers who pretended to represent the Jerusalem apostles, were endeavoring to undermine it.

Then, after the briefest of greetings, and a basic statement of his proposition that deliverance comes "from" and "through" Christ alone, and specifically through Christ's death for sin, according to the will of God, he plunges right into his sharp rebuke (v. 6)—

> *"I MARVEL that ye are so soon removed from him that called you—that is, God—into the grace of Christ, unto another gospel."*

The Galatians had turned from God, from the grace of Christ, and from the Gospel of salvation. They would not, of course, "recognize" or "admit" this, but Paul leaves no middle ground. He cuts the issue sharp and clear from the very beginning: it's this or that: they are opposite extremes: it can't be both.

This is what we must do in our presentation of the Truth. There are those who want to emphasize all points of agreement first, and then work up to the differences. This is confusing. The scriptural way is to point out the great, broad dividing line between Truth and error—the "major," "basic" differences that one must choose between at the outset—then fill in the details.

Then come those thundering words twice repeated, which are so often, and rightly, quoted to introduce our lectures—

> *"If we—or any man—or an angel from heaven—preach any other gospel, let him be accursed"* (vs. 8-9).

What vehemence! Where is the "gentle," "diplomatic," "conciliatory," "brotherly" Paul? He shows up later in the epistle, in the proper place, after he has lifted up the fallen banner of Truth among them, "high" and "bright" and "uncompromising"; but this is the time for "very," "very" plain speaking.

Then, beginning at verse 11, to the end of chapter 2, he demonstrates that the gospel he preached came directly and independently and in its entirety to him from God through Christ, and that he had learned nothing second hand through any man on earth.

He had a thorough knowledge of the scriptures from his youth. He was exceeding zealous, and "profited" or "advanced"

(Revised Version) beyond his contemporaries (v. 14). He must have pondered many things.

Then Christ struck him down with a personal appearance on the way to Damascus, and the announcement that he whom Paul was persecuting was the one who fulfilled the whole Old Testament revelation.

Paul had three days of darkness and fasting for intense self-searching and meditation, rearranging his entire mental picture.

There is an indication that Ananias gave him only pre-baptismal instruction.

It was simply a reception of his sight, and a filling with the Holy Spirit, and immediately he arose and was baptized (Acts 9:18).

> *"And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues"* (Acts 9:20).

His account here, in Galatians 1:16-17, is—

> *"Immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood, neither went to the apostles at Jerusalem, but went into Arabia"* (to be entirely alone).

The "immediately" would indicate that this directly followed his public announcing in the synagogues of Damascus his newfound belief in Christ.

Where he went in "Arabia"; or how long he stayed, or under what conditions he lived, we are not told. The whole impression we get is that it was for a "direct," "detailed," "personal" revelation from Christ, and his mental adjustment to this tremendous revolution in his life. It could have been in the desert near Damascus, or it could well have been at Sinai where other wonderful revelations had been received.

* * *

Then he returned to Damascus (v. 17) and preached so energetically that the disciples had to suddenly and secretly send him away to save his life from the aroused antagonism of the orthodox Jews (Acts 9:23-25).

This verse 18 of chapter 1, was three years after his conversion, and it was not until now that he had any contact with the apostles, and then only for fifteen days.

His purpose in going to Jerusalem was to make the personal acquaintance of Peter. That's what the word translated "see," *historeo* (history), means, information, verse 18. This would be very fitting, both from a personal point of view of interest and friendship, and also for the unity of the Truth. Paul was

obviously becoming more prominent, and he was prophetically and announcedly destined to become much more prominent still, as the specific "apostle to the Gentiles." Jerusalem was the headquarters of the work of the Truth, and the headquarters of the apostles whom Christ had previously appointed to preside over the dissemination of that Truth. It was virtually essential that he and they meet in fellowship to symbolize and cement this unity.

Again, Paul on this visit preached at Jerusalem so energetically that he aroused bitter and violent opposition, and had, as at Damascus, to be sent away to save his life (Acts 9:26-30).

For eleven more years he preached independently, first in the region around his home of Tarsus, and later—after Barnabas had fetched him from there (Acts 11:21-26)—at Antioch, which was growing into the major center of the Truth after Jerusalem.

Chapter 2:1-10 discusses another visit, eleven years after the first, and fourteen years from his conversion.

There has always been a question whether this was the famine visit of Acts 11:30, or the Council visit of Acts 15. There are good arguments for both, and good answers to each argument, making either possible.

The answer is not vital, and it is easy to over-spend attention and energy on questions that can never be positively determined. We will probably find ourselves alternating from one view to another as we weigh the arguments. However, it seems simplest and most natural to take it that this was his second visit to Jerusalem, and that he is not skipping over one to the third. He is explaining his total independence from the apostles, and the reasons and circumstances of his Jerusalem visit.

The epistle itself, too, seems to fit better before the Acts 15 Jerusalem council which officially and publicly determined the Gentiles' freedom from the Mosaic Law. But this is *not* conclusive, because the Judaizers' argument might now be, not that this Law was absolutely necessary, but that it was a holier and higher way for a special standing with God.

We know that even after the Jerusalem Council, the Judaizers did continue to plague the Body, and finally corrupted it into the Catholic Church.

Paul says (ch. 2, v. 2) that on this visit he privately explained to the leading apostles the Gospel he preached *"lest he had run in vain"*; not that he sought their advice or approval, but that they should all present a united front against the Judaizers,

and not allow them to set one against the other, to the destruction of Paul's work.

He says the apostles at Jerusalem added nothing to him (v. 6), made no addition or adjustment to his knowledge or his gospel, and gave him the right hand of fellowship in, and blessing upon, his work (v. 9).

He also says (vs. 3-5), that some "false brethren" applied pressure to have his companion, the Gentile Titus, circumcised, but that he resolutely refused, obviously with the full knowledge and agreement of the apostles.

* * *

The second half of chapter 2, verse 11 on, is the case of his rebuking Peter at Antioch. Peter was clearly the most prominent of the Apostles. He had been chosen to open the gates of the Kingdom to both Jew and Gentile. He had received the vision of the unclean animals, and he had eaten with the Gentile Cornelius, many years earlier.

At first, at Antioch, he did the same, eating freely with the Gentile believers; but when some Judaizers came from James (but not necessarily with James' approval of their views), Peter withdrew from eating with the Gentiles. Following his example, so did all the other Jews, including even Barnabas.

Doubtless it was love and kindness. Doubtless the motive was good. Doubtless they did not want to offend the Judaizing Jews who had not yet come to see the picture clearly. Quite likely they explained this to the Gentile believers, that the Jerusalem Jewish believers were not ready for this, and it was not a time to force an issue and cause a division—that the strong must bear with the weak, and not do anything to cause a brother to stumble.

But Paul could see the issue more clearly, and recognized that this was a crisis that had to be resolutely faced and decisively dealt with, if the unity of the Truth was to survive. Properly handled, it was a passive incident. Neglected, it could be a permanent detour in the Truth's advance.

An unchallenged victory for the Judaizers at Antioch, the then center of Jewish-Gentile unity and freedom in Christ, could have set a radiating pattern of disruption and turmoil, and division between Jew and Gentile.

Paul's address to Peter starts in verse 14; where it ends is not clear. It was a public rebuke, and doubtless on the occasion, Paul went beyond the specific rebuke to Peter to a general address to all present on the basic principles—which were not

necessary for Peter himself, for he knew and accepted and practiced them. So the rest of the chapter will sum up what Paul said on the occasion, and also converges back into Paul's message to the Galatians.

He sums up the basic principle in verses 19-20—

"I through the Law am dead to the Law"—

or, more literally and generally—

"I through law am dead to law . . . I am crucified with Christ . . . I died . . . I live again under an entirely new principle . . . yet it is not I but Christ that lives in me, and I in Christ . . . I am wholly absorbed in Christ . . . my entire life and being are in the faith of Christ who loved me and gave himself for me."

He had gone far beyond law. He had grown up out of law. He had left it behind like the necessary, unexplained, mechanical disciplines of early childhood. He had grown up to love and devotion where the will of the loved is infinitely greater incentive and restraint from the most rigid of compulsory legal requirements. "The law," he said to Timothy, "is not for the righteous, but for the lawless and disobedient" (1 Tim. 1:9).

We must develop far beyond the elementary kindergarten lessons of compulsory law to intense, personal love of Christ and God and righteousness and the beauty of holiness—

"I delight to do Thy will, O God!"

But unless this complete absorption into Christ—this complete and driving devotion and dedication to drawing ever closer and closer to God and to perfection—unless it truly takes over and transforms our life, then the Judaizers were right after all by casting off the pure and holy bonds of law, we have just opened the door to all the indulgences and deceptiveness of the flesh.

* * *

Chapters 3 and 4 are the doctrinal arguments against the present application of the Law of Moses—that it was a secondary, temporary arrangement added much later to the basic plan of salvation through faith; that it was, 1) To expose sin, 2) convict all of sin, 3) show to all the impossibility of anyone earning life; 4) to foreshadow and typify and lead up to Christ; 5) that it was the mere elementary, passing impotent shadow of which Christ is the glorious, all-powerful, eternal reality.

To return to the Law of Moses is not, as the Judaizers claimed, a higher step of holiness, but a falling right back down

from the things of the Spirit which transforms the heart, to the things that merely regulate the flesh.

The doctrinal argument continues to verse 12 of chapter 5.

"I would they were even cut off which trouble you."

—a verse that most modern commentators give an absurd and crude meaning, which the NEB even coarsely inserts into its text as if it were the Word of God.

* * *

The exhortation begins (v. 13 of ch. 5)—

"Brethren, ye have been called unto liberty: only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but BY LOVE SERVE ONE ANOTHER."

Liberty is a tremendous responsibility. Like matured adults, we have been turned loose from the detailed and mechanical restraints of law. We have been told by God—

"This is what I desire. This is what will please me. If you love me, this is what you will work to do, and you will never feel that you have ever been able to do enough: you will always yearn to do more and better. You will have no interest in worldly rubbish."

The obligations of love are infinitely greater and deeper than the obligations of law. Just as the responsibilities and duties of adulthood are greater than those of childhood.

"For all the Law is fulfilled in one word: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (v. 14).

Who ever attains to this divine ideal of loving others as themselves?—of taking on all the joys and burdens of others, and sharing everything we hope with them without restraint?

But this is the ideal to which we must constantly strive to bring ourselves. Anything short of this is ugly, fleshly smallness and selfishness of heart and mind.

"But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another" (v. 15).

This in the Truth should be absolutely unthinkable. IS IT? We may be a long way from reaching the pinnacle of the ideal, but if we haven't gotten far beyond this, we haven't even begun.

"This I say, then, walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh" (v. 16).

Man is a very strange contraption. He is like a pair of scales. One side or the other can very easily go up or down. And when it goes down it can very easily go very far down. But he can also attain very high.

"Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh."

It is the only way. We must give ourselves wholly to the Spirit of the Word. We can choose—we can choose what we throw onto the scales. We can choose the guidance of the Spirit as revealed in the Word of Life, or we can choose the guidance of the thoughts and desires of the flesh.

No one can plead inability. We can do whatever we want to do, if we want it badly enough, and will seek the help and guidance in the right place.

We can "walk in the Spirit." If we couldn't, we would not be told to do so. God does not mock us, any more than He lets us mock Him. Of course we cannot reach perfection. Of course we shall repeatedly stumble, and have to try again. But the basic portion of our life can be purity and love and kindness and service and holiness and spiritual-mindedness, if we really want it to be.

> *"The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh . . . so that ye cannot do the things that ye would"* (v. 17).

The flesh is always there, and always strong. We shall never accomplish fully what we desire in love to do for God. But in interpreting these words, let us remember that Paul falls within their description. He could say *"Be ye followers of me, even as I am of Christ."* He could say *"God is witness how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you"* (1 Thess. 2:10). But still he would be the first to recognize that, having done his utmost, he himself came under this description—

> *"Ye cannot do the things that ye would."*

In the rest of the chapter, he lists the works of the flesh and the fruits of the Spirit. Among the works of the flesh are some terrible things that hopefully none of us would ever dream of. But also there are some other terrible things that, sadly we do not always realize are so terrible in God's sight, but to Him they may be the most terrible, because they violate and profane and tread underfoot the very essence of love for one another, which is the basic principle of the law of life,—

> *"Variance, hatred, wrath, strife, envying, and such like."*
>
> *"They which do such things shall not inherit the Kingdom of God"* (vs. 20-21).

But (vs. 22-24)—*"ARE WE CHRIST'S?"*

The Mind of Christ

"If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Rom. 8:9).

This is a plea for a searching self-examination of our lives, to see whether we are on the way of life.

I do not believe there is sufficient realization among us of the magnitude of the divine call—of how deeply it should reach into and transform every aspect of our lives—of the great changes it must bring about in our characters and the direction of all our activities—of how we spend ALL our time and efforts and money.

The prize that we seek is infinitely beyond anything we can comprehend. For the devotion of a brief lifetime, God is offering us perfect joy for all eternity. The present is such an infinitesimal fraction of the future that it is the utterest folly not to give up everything possible in the present in order to assure the future. This folly will be tragically apparent at the judgment seat.

What God asks—and it is such a pitiful little compared to what He offers—is complete devotion, complete dedication, complete putting away of the present, complete consecration of the whole life to the service of God.

Everything depends upon the COMPLETENESS of the dedication. One-half will not do; three-fourths will not do; nine-tenths will not do. God requires ALL our life, ALL our interest, ALL our labor and activity.

The reason part time service will not do is that there is *no such thing* as part time service to God. We CANNOT serve two masters. If it does not involve the whole heart and life and strength and love, it is *no service to God at all.*

It is the few who perceive this who find the way of life. The many who do not, only follow the way of death.

Jesus expresses it most broadly and deeply when he says:

> *"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with ALL thy heart, and with ALL thy strength, and with ALL thy soul, and with ALL thy mind."*

This, he says, is the *first* commandment. He says it comprises ALL commandments.

The trouble is that we can read commandments like this, fully accept them, and yet never realize or comprehend the fulness and depth of their meaning—the magnitude of WHAT THEY REQUIRE OF US.

If we could really and fully perceive the infinite greatness of the destiny offered us, it would completely transform our lives. Every thought and action would be affected. We would be entirely different creatures from the common world around us, instead of being so sadly like them in so many ways.

The best this world offers—its greatest riches, its fullest pleasures, its highest honors, its most distinguished powers and positions and opportunities—are less than NOTHING, compared to the destiny that awaits the approved of God.

In the ebb and flow of this uncertain world, the presidency of the United States is at the moment the greatest power and prominence to which man can aspire. Its honors are great, its powers and prestige are great, its opportunities for affecting human history and advancing human welfare are great. But all these things are mere children's mud-pies compared to the position of the LEAST of those who attain to the Kingdom of God.

We know this theoretically. We fully accept it as a logical proposition. But do we FEEL it and LIVE IT IN OUR LIVES? Are our lives consistent with this tremendous conception? Or are we just a few more natural creatures thinly veneered over with a little religious sentiment?

Do we conduct our lives in harmony with what we *profess* to be—THE HIGHEST ARISTOCRACY OF THE UNIVERSE—the divine, eternal aristocracy of righteousness—infinitely higher than all the kings and presidents of this poor little passing world of wickedness?

We say, quoting Scripture—

"The whole world lieth in wickedness" (1 Jn. 5:19).

—and truly it does. Whatever is natural, whatever is human, whatever is not intelligent and purposeful godliness is wickedness.

But how different are WE? Just believing a few first principles of Bible truth and calling ourselves Christadelphians does not automatically make us saints. It could much more easily make us hypocrites.

* * *

Paul says (Rom. 8:9), and this is the key passage of our subject—

"If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his."

Here, then, is a clear test. Do we have the spirit of Christ? *This is the most important question anyone can ask himself.*

First of all, what does it mean to have the spirit of Christ? How would you define it? How would you *test yourself* to see whether you had it or not?

If we cannot define it, we can be reasonably sure we have not got it, because the spirit of Christ is only acquired by learning what it is in its various aspects of character, and consciously—effortfully—adopting it.

We can begin to define it from this same Romans 8—

> *"They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh, but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit"* (v. 5).

This gets us a little closer, but is it really reaching us? Is this another of those statements that we accept without comprehending ? What are the "things of the flesh" and what are the "things of the Spirit," and what does it mean to "mind" them?

The things of the flesh are the things of this present life—food, raiment, shelter, entertainment—all human and natural activity—the natural daily round of possessing and enjoying. The things of the flesh also include all natural thoughts, reactions, emotions, desires, affections, pleasures, etc.

Some of the things of the flesh are good and some are not. Those that are good are those necessary for the continuance of our life and maximum usefulness to God. Whatever does not contribute to this is a harmful detriment.

Where does the line of necessity come? Where does necessity end, and unfaithful stewardship and misusing our Master's goods begin?

It is not for us to say in individual cases, but we are sure that the Scriptures, frankly faced, leave no doubt that the line of duty cuts lower and deeper than most of us desire to live.

The Scriptural standard is—

> *"Having food and raiment, therewith be content."*

And Paul's accompanying observation is—

> *"For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can take nothing out."*

The mind of Christ, and certainly the example that he gave us, is that we should be content with the bare necessities of life, and beyond that point should concentrate ALL our labor and time in the service of God. He gave us an example to follow, and he gently but very pointedly reminded us that—

> *"The servant is not above his Lord."*

The apostles who followed him, and lived as he lived, call our attention to his example in this respect.

And even the bare necessities must not be our *primary* concern, for that is lack of faith—

"Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you."

We seem to be speaking more of restrictions—what we should not do, rather than that we should do, but this is not really the case. The biggest harm in many things of the flesh simply lies in the fact that they fill the mind and take the time and effort and attention from spiritual things.

We are called upon to be *positively* spiritual, to be CONSTRUCTIVELY spiritual—to "always abound in the work of the Lord." We are not called upon to be just negatively spiritual—just to not do things forbidden—we are here to work actively and to the fulness of our strength in the works of God.

In many things the positive will crowd out the negative if the positive gets big and strong enough.

We must not only "always abound in the work of the Lord"—we must WANT to do so, we must be lovingly and gratefully *anxious* to do so. God insists upon, not just all our strength, but—far more important—all our heart and soul.

If a brother or sister truly gets the spirit of Christ, truly IS Christ's, it will not be necessary to exhort them to "always abound in the work of the Lord."

It will not be necessary to exhort them to attend and support all the classes and meetings of the ecclesia. If they have the spirit of Christ, if they truly are Christ's—in heart and not just in name—they just could not stay away, if it were humanly possible to get there. Their whole heart and soul and mind would be with the brethren and sisters—those few whom God has given us as companions in the glorious pathway to the Kingdom.

Paul agonizingly travailed in birth over many, long after they had passed through the waters of baptism, that Christ should be truly born in them.

A brother with the spirit of Christ would not dream of missing a meeting he could possibly attend, or of not supporting to the fulness of his means, yea, and beyond his means, every activity of the Truth and work of the Lord.

* * *

"They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh . . ."

Do we regard our real life and joy as the time we are able to give to God's work, keeping all other activity to a minimum so

that we can give the fulness of our heart and strength in thankful service to God?

Or do we live like the rest of the world—busy days, lazy evenings, pleasure-seeking weekends, minds full of worldly things—wrapped up in houses, gardens, cars, boats, sports, food, raiment, personal adornment, and the pitifully childish decking out of these vile, perishing bodies—interested in the world's activities—excited about sports, stupified by television?

The call of the Gospel is a call to WORK—lifelong work, and it does not mean just a poor little self-satisfied hour a week sending out lecture invitations.

It means continuous day-in and day-out labor and dedication, in season and out of season.

Consider a few passages—

"Who is a faithful and wise servant . . . blessed is that servant whom his lord, when he cometh shall find so doing."

"Thou wicked and slothful servant! Take the pound from him and give it to him that hath ten pounds."

"Occupy till I come."

"Unto whom much is given, from him shall much be required."

"Depart from me: I was hungry and ye fed me not, thirsty and ye gave me no drink; naked and ye clothed me not, a stranger and ye took me not in."

"When ye have done ALL that is commanded you (who can ever feel they have?) *say, We are unprofitable servants."*

"ALWAYS ABOUNDING in the work of the Lord."

Are these discouraging? Not a bit of it! But they are challenging; they are thought-provoking; they are deeply searching and penetrating. Do we have the mind of Christ?—

"I must be about my Father's business."

If we have the mind of Christ we shall eagerly desire, like Paul, to "spend and be spent" in the service of our beloved Master. We shall resolutely strip our life of all non-essentials that cater to the flesh, and devote all our time and strength and goods to the welfare of the Truth and the Brotherhood.

"If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is NONE OF HIS."

* * *

The mind of Christ is more than eager labor for God. It is love, kindness, gentleness, patience, joyfulness, cheerfulness, re-

joicing even in tribulation, eagerness to make peace, to forgive and seek forgiveness, to cover a multitude of sins. Let us frankly rate ourselves in these characteristics.

"If we would judge (diakrino—examine) ourselves, we should not be judged (krino—chastened, punished, condemned by God)."

Paul says in verse 8 (still in Rom. 8)—

"To be spiritually minded is life and peace."

Therefore, if we do not have peace—inner peace—peace of mind—cheerful, joyful inner harmony—we are not spiritually minded—we have not the mind of Christ—we are none of his.

Upon what does peace of mind depend? Upon two things:

1. Recognizing that "ALL things work together for good." That whatever happens is for the best and has a wise and loving divine purpose, and if fully accepted and properly used, will lead us forward on the way toward eternal joy.

Therefore Paul could say—

"I rejoice in tribulation, knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience godliness."

2. A consciousness of harmony with God, to the best of our ability, and ever striving for closer harmony.

We shall never be perfect. We shall never be able to do all we would, or as well as we would, but if our life as a whole is dedicated to God and to love, and we feel in ourselves we are each day getting just a little closer, we shall have peace of mind.

* * *

The mind of Christ is *unselfishness.* We shall never be any good to God as long as we are wrapped up in ourselves, wrapped up in our own petty pleasures and problems.

There is nothing smaller than a self-centered mind. There is nothing larger than a spiritual mind. It comprehends eternity. It is free and untrammelled. It radiates power and goodness.

In the first eleven chapters of Romans Paul paints a broad and glorious picture of the purpose of God with mankind. It is tremendous and overwhelming, especially as compared with this petty, crawling existence, and Paul himself expresses the godly mind's awed and reverent reaction at the end of chapter 11—

"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God . . ."

"For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to Whom be glory for ever!"

Then, beginning chapter 12, he brings the whole weight and force of this magnificient divine revelation to bear directly upon you and upon me—

"I beseech you THEREFORE, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice."

This word "beseech" is a strong one. In 2nd Corinthians 8:4 it is translated "with much entreaty." It carries the sense of great urgency—intense pleading and persuasion. It expresses Paul's deep conviction that this is the only POSSIBLE way that gratitude can respond to such divine love and wisdom.

"I beseech you therefore by the mercies of God."

He does not command, by the *judgment* of God, but beseeches by His *mercy*. We, too, must maintain this approach. The deeper we go into the responsibilities and obligations of the Truth, the more we must present them as a beseeching because of mercy, rather than a commanding because of judgment.

In view of the infinite mercies of God, His love, His forbearing, His kindness toward man in providing such a glorious destiny, I beseech you to present your bodies a living sacrifice.

* * *

"I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1).

This, too, is a familiar passage with Christadelphians. It has a powerful, stirring ring, and adds life to any exhortation.

But do we know what it MEANS? Have we DONE—are we DOING—what he so impassionedly pleads with us to do?

"That ye present your BODIES a living sacrifice."

Why our bodies? Why does he not say our hearts, our minds, our lives? Because he wants to drive it home in as practical and powerful way as possible.

Most people prefer to keep their religion indefinite and ethereal—feelings and emotions—sensations and experiences.

But Paul says, Present your BODIES, your hands and feet, your eyes and ears and mouth, you, yourself, in all your daily activity—your attention, your abilities, your strength.

"A living sacrifice"—a life of sacrifice. Sacrifice is a yielding up—an offering—a total devotion to a purpose. Sacrifice is a joyful thing—a privilege and an opportunity. The sacrifices of the Mosaic Law were for reconciliation, for thanksgiving, for fellowship and communion with God—a joyful seeking of His

presence, a thankful recognition of His goodness, an expression of participation in the greatness of His purpose.

"Holy." This is an essential part of the mind of Christ—

"Be ye holy, for I am holy."

"Be ye holy in all manner of conversation."

"Without holiness no man shall see God."

Holiness is separation, both mental and physical, from all that is unclean and defiling. The world is unholy, fleshly, carnal. All its actions are unholy—for they are natural and animal. "The whole world," says John, "lieth in wickedness."

Mankind is defiled because of sin. ALL natural thinking, ALL natural activity is sin. It is part of the sin constitution; it is unsanctified. Ungodliness, unholiness is our natural atmosphere and condition as sons of Adam.

Holiness is a repudiation of all that is natural, and a prayerful endeavor to think and act in harmony with all that is spiritual. It is a day-to-day and moment-to-moment subduing of the flesh.

Holiness in its deepest aspect is a purifying of the mind from natural thoughts and desires and reactions, and filling the mind continually with spiritual thoughts—thoughts of God and His goodness and His glorious purpose and revelation.

Holiness is feeding deeply on the Word of God—striving to fill the mind with its beauties—to expand the mind from the natural pettiness of the flesh to largeness and breadth of comprehension. Paul says—

"The natural man cannot know the things of the Spirit of God . . . but he that is spiritual discerneth all things . . ."

"We have the mind of Christ."

Holiness is cleansing the heart by the washing of the Word, recognizing that the natural motions of the flesh are evil, selfish, impatient, unkind, harsh, proud, unclean—realizing that only by constant prayer and study and effort can the natural man be put to death within us, and the new man be created and nourished into newness of life.

The fruit of the Spirit—the mind of the Spirit—is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control.

* * *

The fruit of the Spirit—the mind of Christ—is *love*—a spirit of sympathy and kindness and compassion and mercy—a Godlike, Christlike outlook toward others—not condoning sin, but sincerely desirous of helping others out of the way of sin

into the way of life—a deep fellow-feeling for all the victims of this death-tending body of sin.

This was the mind of Christ—

"I came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them."

This must be our mind too.

Holiness forbids us from associating with sin and error, but it is not ours to condemn, only to exhort and persuade.

The flesh is quick to criticize and condemn, to find fault, to talk of the sins and weaknesses of others. The flesh is very quick to impute motives, to pass judgment.

Truly we must preach righteousness, as Christ did, clearly and fearlessly; we must preach holiness; we must preach perfection. Truly we must condemn sin.

But we must do it as a doctor, seeking to heal and make strong, rather than as an executioner, zealous to destroy.

We must point out with crystal clarity, and to the best of our ability, what is wrong and what is right, what leads to life and what leads to death, what is of the flesh and what is of the Spirit.

But how sad—how unutterably tragic—when our condemnation of the flesh is made in the spirit of the flesh! And this we find is usually the case, for the loving, forgiving, reconciling, spiritual mind of Christ is so rare among men, even among men called brethren.

How quick we are to call down fire from heaven! How we like to feed our pride and self-esteem with what we like to call "righteous indignation" and "zeal for the Lord"!

Christ led a life of patience, and gentleness, and submission to evil, praying for his enemies, doing good to them that hated him, even as he taught his followers.

But on rare occasions, by the direct authority and inspiration of God, he spoke in burning condemnation of stubborn, entrenched wickedness and self-righteous hypocrisy which had seen the Spirit manifested in mighty power, and had presumptuously rejected it.

Because our flesh is evil, we would much rather copy him in the latter than in the former—much rather ape his special divine authority than follow his self-crucifying example.

> *"Love suffereth long, and is kind; love seeketh not her own, thinketh no evil, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things; love covereth a multitude of sins."*

The fruit of the Spirit—the mind of Christ—is *joy*. This must be our basic frame of mind—joy in God, joy in His infinite goodness and mercy—joy in the assurance that all things work together for good, joy that—regardless of the trial and discouragements of the passing present—we are on the winning side, the eternal side, the side of righteousness and power, the side that is guaranteed the eternal victory.

Joy that we have been shown the meaning and purpose of the present groaning travail of creation—that it is merely the brief birth pangs of a glorious eternal creation of righteousness—a new heaven and earth of eternal beauty.

These are the things to which God's love has called us, and all our frustrations and struggles and problems are stepping stones to that glorious destiny.

If we have the mind of Christ, we shall be filled with an unearthly joy and thankfulness that radiates to all around us. They will perceive, as men did of the apostles, that we have been with Jesus. We shall seek to communicate our joy to all, and embrace them in its transforming power.

We shall joyfully forgive seventy times seven.

We shall fervently pray for those who oppose and abuse us.

We shall eagerly return good for evil, thanking God for the opportunity that opposition gives us of manifesting the living power and beauty of goodness.

And we shall do this with joy and kindness and thankful humility that God has entrusted us with just a little bit of His divine wisdom to manifest to men the beauty of holiness.

* * *

The fruit of the Spirit—the mind of Christ—is peace. Peace is harmony with God—

> *"Great peace have they that love Thy law, and nothing shall offend them."*

We can never have peace while our heart is divided, or interested in worldly things. Peace can only come through single-minded devotion to spiritual things. Paul says to the Philippians (4:4-7), giving four sure, divinely-attested steps guaranteeing peace—

1. *"Rejoice in the Lord."*
2. *"Let your gentleness be manifest to all men."*
3. *"Do not worry about anything."*
4. *"But in everything*—(there is the key word)—in *EVERYTHING by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be made known to God."*

—and the promised result is positive and inevitable—

"The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, SHALL keep your hearts and minds in Jesus Christ."

Do we have this peace of God which he describes in such marvelous terms? Do we experience this quiet, unassailable, joyful tranquility of which the world has no comprehension? We are invited to partake of it. The way is clearly shown—

1. Rejoice in the Lord.

In view of God's *infinite* goodness, there is no other possible frame of mind for His children.

2. Be gentle, loving, and forebearing toward all men.

In view of man's pitiful frailty and weakness, there is no other possible attitude for God's children.

Gentleness is the key to all worthwhile relationships. It is self-control and spirituality—beauty and dignity and maturity of character. The flesh is naturally rough and crude, and if we have the mere facts of the Gospel without its gentle spirit, our zeal for God will be but fleshly self-assertion and rudeness.

3. Do not worry about anything.

Worry is distrust, fear, unfaith, disbelief, lack of trust in God.

4. Draw near to God in everything and for everything—in thankfulness and prayer.

Drawing near to God does not mean merely pious supplication. It means a quiet and consistent effort to approach unto *the likeness of His glorious character and holiness.*

This is peace. This is the mind of Christ. This is the mind of the Spirit—the overcoming of the flesh and of the world. This is the way of life—the only POSSIBLE way of life—

"To be fleshly minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace."

"If any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his" (Rom. 8:6-9).

Paul commands (Rom. 12:10)—

"Be kindly-affectioned one to another, with brotherly love."

This clearly does not refer to times and circumstances when this comes naturally, for then we have no need of the exhortation.

Its significant bearing is upon times when circumstances would provoke us to be otherwise. Brethren are always brethren, no matter how they act. They must some day answer for it as brethren. Our kindness and affection may be the one needful thing in winning a brother back to the way of life, so

in failing to manifest them we may have a brother's blood upon our hands at the judgment seat of Christ. We are our brother's keeper, and it is the erring ones that most need our love.

* * *

In chapter 14 (of Romans) Paul expounds and manifests by example one of the deepest and most powerful aspects of the mind of Christ—a divine principle of conduct that can solve easily and simply nearly all problems among brethren.

Paul is speaking of cases where the action of one brother, though perfectly legitimate in itself, causes concern or offence or distress to another. HERE is the great test of the mind of Christ—

> *"Let no man judge his brother, but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way."*
>
> *"If thy brother be grieved with thy meat*—or anything you may do that is not essential to be done—*now walkest thou not in love."*
>
> *"Destroy not him with thy meat for whom Christ died."*

Christ gladly *died* for him, even while he was yet a sinner, in the hope of his redemption, but if we willfully distress others and cause them to stumble by persisting in things which they do not believe are right (v. 21).—

> *"It is good neither to eat flesh, nor drink wine, nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak."*

If we persist in anything that troubles another brother or sister, we create tension and estrangement that gradually erodes ecclesial unity and frays the bonds of affection that are essential to sound ecclesial life. "No man," says Paul in this chapter, "lives to himself."

Our every act has an eternal, unchangeable effect, for good or ill. A small evil may have everlasting reverberations. Speaking on the same subject to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 8:13), Paul sums up his own mind, and the mind of Christ—

> *"Wherefore if meat make my brother to offend, I WILL EAT NO FLESH WHILE THE WORLD STANDETH, lest I make my brother to offend."*

The pre-eminent motive of love is the welfare of others, and the forebearing of one's own desires and advantage for the common good.

WHOEVER IS NOT DEEPLY IMBUED WITH THIS SENTIMENT AS THE MAIN-SPRING OF THEIR LIVES IS *NOT A*

BROTHER OF CHRIST AND NEED EXPECT NO WELCOME FROM HIM WHEN HE RETURNS.

"If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his."

"We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves."

"Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification."

"For even Christ pleased not himself, but as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me."

CHRIST HIMSELF, THE SON OF GOD, THE KING OF KINGS, THE HEIR OF THE UNIVERSE, PLEASED NOT HIMSELF, BUT CHOSE THE PATH OF REPROACH AND SUFFERING AND SELF-DENIAL FOR THE SAKE OF OTHERS.

Paul again stresses this essential principle of godliness in writing to the Philippians (2:1-5)—

"Fulfil ye my joy; be likeminded; have the same love: let nothing be done through strife or pride . . ."

"Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others."

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

Thy Speech Bewrayeth Thee

"If any man among you SEEM to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, that man's religion is VAIN" (Jam. 1:26).

The Scriptures have much to say about our speech. The importance of its relation to the way of life or the way of death could hardly be overemphasized. The Spirit through Solomon declared (Prov. 18:21)—

"Life and death are in the power of the tongue."

By the medium of speech, Eve was persuaded to transgress the law of God. By the same medium, countless since have been deceived into the way of death. By it, too, many have been led into the way of Truth and Life.

And not only is our course directed by the influence of speech from without, but our own faithful or unfaithful use of this great power will determine our eternal destiny, for here is the key to a man's character and heart. Jesus said—

"Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh."

If the Truth is uppermost in our hearts, it will be uppermost in our speech. We all know brethren and sisters of whom this is true, and we know brethren and sisters of whom it is *not* true. Here is one of the most searching tests as to whether we truly are "in the Faith." Of course, some talk a lot about the Truth who do not have the true *spirit* of the Truth—talking is not everything—but we can be sure that *those whose conversation is always about other things are certainly not "in the Faith."*

And it is not just the subject matter of our conversation that determines our heart—it is the *spirit and character.* The Truth can be used in conversation as an instrument of abuse and antagonism to gratify pride and the perverse, evil reactions of the flesh within us. Solomon says—

"There is that speaketh like the piercing of a sword, but the tongue of the wise is health" (Prov. 12:18).

We know, of course, that the pure Spirit-Word is sharper and more piercing than any sword, but it must be wielded in meekness and wisdom and love to purge and purify, but not to condemn and destroy—

"If a man be overtaken in a fault, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Gal. 6:1).

And again (2 Tim. 2:24-25)—

"The servant of the Lord MUST NOT STRIVE, but be gentle unto all men, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves."

"Speak evil of no man, but be gentle, showing ALL meekness unto ALL men" (Tit. 3:2).

The supreme importance of the proper control and use of the tongue is vividly illustrated by Jesus' solemn declaration—

"By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Matt. 13:37).

And David says in Psalm 34:12-13—

"What man is he that desireth life? Keep thy tongue from evil and thy lips from speaking guile."

James' short epistle devotes a whole chapter to the power of the tongue—to what a tremendous influence it wields, and how difficult it is to control. It is among those things of which Jesus says—

"With man it is impossible, but with God, all things are possible."

In this matter, we must confess our helplessness, and earnestly seek God's help. James says (3:2)—

"If a man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man and able to bridle the whole body."

If we can learn to control our tongue, we can overcome and control all. James remarks that the same tongue will pour forth blessing and cursing—blessing God with a great show of reverence and love and then turning around and cursing men, whom God hath made in His own image and all of whom He would desire to have taught and led in the loving way of life and Truth.

It is the lesson of the unmerciful debtor, and we all need to take it to heart. Who are we—weak, sinful creatures dependent upon God's love and mercy—*who are we* to take it upon ourselves to berate and condemn others? It is a natural, evil tendency of the flesh to criticize and find fault. James searchingly and decisively sums up the vital importance of our speech when he says (1:26)—

"If any man among you SEEMETH to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, THAT MAN'S RELIGION IS VAIN."

The Scripture gives much detailed instruction regarding this essential bridling of the tongue. Let us consider this instruction together, and then all *search our hearts* to see whether by failure to properly use and control this member we are making our religion vain. The Scriptures refer to at least twenty different aspects of the use of the tongue in which we can

manifest the vanity of our religion. Some—such as *lying*—we may at first glance feel constitute no problem or danger as regards the brethren of Christ, but if we look into each more deeply—remembering how the law of Christ searched right down into the dark and sometimes unsuspected roots of our inmost thoughts and motives—we shall realize that *all are matters of real concern for each of us.* As James says, in alerting us to the dangers of the evil motions of the flesh within us—

> *"Do you think that the Scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy"* (Jam. 4:5)?

Take then, this matter of lying. Paul says, speaking of the new man, created after God in righteousness and true holiness—

> *"Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor"* (Eph. 4:26).

Jesus promised in Matthew 5 that the pure in heart, and *they alone,* should see God. The Spirit through Jeremiah declares that the natural heart of man is deceitful above all things. Any deceit is lying. The purifying of the heart is a life-long task. Who of us can say we have never shunned to declare the whole truth, regardless of embarrassment or personal disadvantage? Surely none of us who have embraced the Truth would consciously tell a lie, but how easy to keep silent or cover up a mistake or give an incorrect impression, or allow a misunderstanding rather than openly face the consequences with a fearless purity of heart!

The full stature of the perfect man in Christ Jesus is an infinitely high ideal. Blessed are the pure—the *completely, guilelessly* pure—in heart, for they alone shall see God.

* * *

Evil speaking, backbiting, and talebearing comprise another manifestation of the evil of the flesh that finds vent through the tongue—a very common evil that only the power of the Spirit can control. Unless we are constantly careful, and unless we are purely motivated by love and the mind of the Spirit, we shall find that much of our conversation about others, when honestly evaluated by divine standards, comes under the heading of gossip and backbiting.

True, there are times when it is necessary to speak of the faults of others. But unless it *is* truly necessary, and done in the scriptural way, and in the proper scriptural spirit, we are running a grave risk of divine condemnation. The Spirit through Solomon declares—

"The words of a talebearer are wounds and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly" (Prov. 26:22).

The immediate reaction of the flesh, on reading this passage, is to be struck with how remarkably it fits someone else. But let us, for the time being, curb this evil reaction and consider how remarkably they fit *ourselves*—how many times we have allowed the natural malice, of which we all have a share, to lead us into this flesh-gratifying sin. *"The words of a talebearer are as dainty morsels"*—how searchingly true this divine analysis!

The way of the Truth is the way of love—in *all* relationships. If our feeling toward our brethren and sisters is not pure love, regardless of their faults and weaknesses, then we ourselves are not the children of God, but are of the world. Love is kindness and gentleness and a desire to help and strengthen. Solomon records again (Prov. 17:9)—

"He that covereth a transgression seeketh love, but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends."

This does not mean a glossing over or condoning of what is wrong, but a proper, pure-hearted, sympathetic, loving approach with a desire to build up. *Let us take heed that we do not stand at the judgment seat exposed before all as what Paul describes as "tattlers and busybodies"* (1 Tim. 5:13). It is a very easy and common sin. "Speak evil of no man" is the command. Even in our proclaiming of the Truth, let us take heed. We are not judges or executioners, but humble messengers with good tidings of light and love and divine compassion and long-suffering.

* * *

Foolish talking is another universal failing of the flesh. "Foolish talking and jesting," says the apostle, are "not convenient"—not fitting—not in harmony with the holiness and solemnity and beauty of our calling.

It is sometimes hard for us to see the point in this, especially if we are young. It seems a crabbed and sour outlook. Joking seems so harmless and good-natured and pleasant. But as the mind grows in spiritual values, light, foolish talking is seen to be empty and shallow and false. The real, abiding joy of the Spirit is gradually realized to be deep and permanent, while humor is so transitory, and basically unsatisfying, with no lasting power. How well is it summed up in Ecclesiastes!

"Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better."

"The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth."

"It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise than for a man to hear the song of fools."

"For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool: this also is vanity" (Ecc. 7:3-6).

* * *

For God's children there is never any place *for angry words*—

"Let ALL bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, be put away from you, and be ye kind" (Eph. 4:31-32).

Solomon says (Ecc. 7:9)—

"Anger resteth in the bosom of fools."

An angry parent cannot be creating a godly child, for godliness is self-control and anger is an immature lack of self-control. How can we be teaching what we are denying by our actions? Do we realize the seriousness of angry words? Jesus clearly warns us (Matt. 5:22)—

"Whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of Gehenna fire."

In the final twenty-one verses of the book of wisdom's way entitled Proverbs, there is a description of the ideal woman—the ideal wife—her price far above rubies. This beautiful picture is both literal and spiritual. In its fullest sense it represents the Bride, the Lamb's wife, and as such it has a message for all who aspire to membership in that glorious community. Verse 26 says—

"She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness."

"In her tongue is the law of kindness." At all times and under all circumstances, otherwise it would be meaningless.

Here is the essence of ideal womanhood.

* * *

Some more than others, but all of us quite often, are guilty of the fleshly folly of just plain *talking too much*—

"In the multitude of words, there wanteth not sin."

This is bound to be true, for a loose tongue cannot be a carefully disciplined tongue. It is the sign of a shallow mind:

"A fool's voice is known by multitude of words" (Ecc. 5:3).

Let us, when we find ourselves chattering, remind ourselves that we are manifesting our folly, and sinning before God. Of those who aspire to the eternal joys of fellowship with Him, He requires constant reverence and circumspection—

"God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few" (Ecc. 5:2).

Jesus warned, regarding a similar abuse of the tongue—

"Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment" (Matt. 12:36).

Some, feeling this to be "an hard saying," have tried to change its meaning by interpreting "idle" as "evil," but when we look honestly into the true meaning of the word, we find it *does really mean* "idle"—"vain"—"profitless"—and it is a sober warning against a very common weakness. The mind of the Spirit is a consistent way of life, and idle, profitless words are *no part of that way.* The Proverbs express the issue with striking plainness (13:3)—

"He that keepeth his mouth, keepeth his life, but he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction."

There is a related error of which the Scriptures speak—the tendency to let talking and proposing take the place of working and accomplishing—

"In all labour there is profit, but the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury" (Prov. 14:23).

This is equally true in the spiritual as in the natural. It is so easy to wish and to propose and to discuss, but the persistent and consistent effort that is required to get things done does not come so readily and easily to natural man.

* * *

Proud-talking is especially offensive to God—

"In the mouth of the foolish is a rod of pride" (Prov. 14:3).

Anything we say that is intended, directly or indirectly, to reflect credit upon ourselves and to impress others, is a form of this folly. If we honestly examine our conversation, we shall find that this is often the motive of our remarks even though, unless we stop to think especially about it, we are hardly conscious of any such motive. The pride of the flesh is so ingrained that it colors our speech without any conscious effort.

In fact, *any* talk about ourselves unless it has a specific and necessary purpose, comes in this general category. Let us beware of the natural tendency to make ourselves and our affairs the center of conversation.

The ungodly say (Psa. 12:4)—

"With our tongues will we prevail: our lips are our own. Who is lord over us?"

If we allow our conversation to follow our natural inclinations, and do not consciously bridle our tongue according to the instruction of the Spirit, we are in practice adopting this proud foolishness of the ungodly, and denying our subjection to any control.

* * *

There is another weakness of the tongue of which we find sad examples in Scriptures, even in righteous men. Proverbs 29:20 says—

> *"Seest thou a man that is hasty in his words? There is more hope of a fool than of him."*

To be habitually hasty of speech—rashly blurting out the first reaction of the flesh, in excitement or annoyance—is truly hopeless, but none are entirely free from this danger.

The great example here, of course, is Moses, the meekest of men, who—under great provocation—spoke hastily and inadvisedly with his lips, and was as a result denied his life's crowning desire. The quick sharp retort is usually regretted, but it can never be recalled, therefore—

> *"The heart of the wise studieth to answer, but the mouth of the wicked poureth out evil things"* (Prov. 15:28).

And James solemnly counsels (1:19)—

> *"Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak."*

* * *

Contention is another abuse of the great power and privilege of speech. Paul says to Titus (3:9)—

> *"Avoid contention, for it is unprofitable and vain."*

And the wisdom of the Spirit in Proverbs tells us—

> *"A fool's lips enter into contention"* (18:6).

Contentiousness is one of the basic natural evils of the flesh. See how children will squabble and quarrel over the most trivial things, just for the sake of squabbling. Paul told the Corinthians that strife among them proved they were still carnal and fleshly-minded spiritual infants. Any strife in an ecclesia indicates there is a *wrong spirit on both sides,* for the spiritually-minded will not be drawn into contention but will comport themselves with gentleness and meekness and love toward all. The Proverbs declare—

> *"It is an honor for a man to cease from strife."*

There *is* indeed such a thing—a noble and dignified and profitable thing—as "contending earnestly for the Faith," but the spiritually wise will distinguish it from fleshly contention

and the natural human spirit of contentiousness. Often, because of the deceptiveness of the flesh, contending for the Truth takes on the evil spirit of fleshly contention. In any difference of opinion we must be on guard against this subtle danger.

* * *

Peter says of Jesus, in warning against another misuse of the tongue (1 Pet. 2:23)—

"When he was reviled, he reviled not again."

When, in his suffering, he was mocked and reviled, he did not retaliate, or allow it to disturb his peace in God, but he looked upon his revilers with pity and compassion and prayed for them, realizing that their evil spirit was only destroying themselves.

To revile is to address or speak of with abuse or contempt. We must take care that this spirit does not creep into our zeal against evil and sin. We are but Gospel messengers—*God* alone is the Judge; He alone has the right to condemn.

* * *

The opposite of reviling is equally condemned in Scripture—*flattery.* In fact the Scriptures speak much more vehemently against this than we would ever expect, and this should lead us to some searching thoughts on this matter—as to why it is so evil, and wherein we are in danger of transgressing. The Spirit saith.—

"A flattering mouth worketh ruin" (Prov. 26:28).

"Meddle not with him that flattereth with his lips" (Prov. 20:19).

"The Lord shall cut off all flattering lips" (Psa. 12:13).

"Their throat is an open sepulchre . . . they flatter with their tongue" (Psa. 5:9).

"He that blesseth his friend with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, it shall be accounted a curse to him" (Prov. 27:14).

To flatter is to praise with a view of gratifying pride, in order to seek some advantage. It is very common in the world, in business and in social intercourse, and is considered part of the necessary apparatus for gaining our ends with people. But God hates it, because it is false and hypocritical and it caters to the pride of the flesh. It is directly opposed to the divine principles of sincerity and the humbling of the flesh.

If we are not careful, we shall often slip into it, for it is very easy and pleasant and has present advantage, and seems to make things easier without apparently doing harm. But let us

remember that it is *false*, and *God hates it.* We must get the pure, high viewpoint of the Spirit.

* * *

On another point, the Spirit warns (Prov. 27:2)—

"Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth."

If we do not set a spiritual guard upon our lips, we shall find that *much of our conversation is subtly flavored with the element of self-praise, self-commendation, and self-glory.*

We instinctively seek to impress others. If not by direct boasting, then by little casual hints and references, we try to make sure others get to know all the "good" or "clever" things we have done.

If we could have a recording of our day's conversation, and then carefully study it over at the end of the day in the light of God's Word, what a sad show it would often make!—How much chaff! How much worldliness! How much juvenile self-glory! How much foolishness! How much out of harmony with the pure, gentle mind of the Spirit!

* * *

The Proverbs are our guide in another matter concerning the tongue. How often we find our inner weaknesses mirrored and exposed by these searching Spirit-words!—

"A fool uttereth all his mind, but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards" (Prov. 29:11).

Who has not many times regretted his failure to remember these words of divine wisdom?—

"Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles."

There are some who seem to have no ability to keep anything to themselves; they must of necessity "utter all their mind." Let us take care we are not among them, for the weakness is much commoner than we are liable to suspect. Many never grow out of this habit of childhood.

* * *

Paul says, counselling against another evil (Eph. 4:29)—

"Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth."

Here again, let us not just take a shallow view and brush this off as a quite unnecessary caution in our case. True, we are happily free from the coarse and lewd conversation that seems to be the principal obsession of this degenerate, Sodom-like generation.

But *what constitutes a "corrupt communication" in God's sight?* The contrast in this passage is—

"But that which is good to the use of edifying."

—implying that what is not good to the use of edifying is corrupt. We are impressed again with the broad principle—

"Whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23).

Even among our words, there are no neutrals. Either we are consciously and purposely edifying, or we are corrupting and breaking down, whether it be intentional or not.

And what are we to do as to the "Filthy conversation of the wicked?" We must be ever on guard not to be drawn into the world's *foolish* talk, for it so often turns to *filthiness* or godlessness, and we find ourselves in a humiliating and compromised position as a part of their corrupt picture.

Even silence is hardly a sufficient witness, for chattering buffoons thoughtlessly take it for consent. Gently but very firmly we must make our abhorrence of corrupt communications clear.

* * *

On another aspect of the use of the tongue, Jesus says—

"Swear not at all . . . Let your communication be, yea, yea; nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil" (Matt. 5:34).

Whatsoever is more than a simple yea and nay, cometh of evil. Any ritual or contrivance to make our statements seem more emphatic or trustworthy "cometh of evil." *How* does it? *What does Jesus mean?*

There is a deep lesson here, and a deep principle involved. Jesus in the early chapters of Matthew portrays the ideal of perfection—

"Be ye PERFECT, even as your Father in heaven is perfect."

Jesus sweeps away all oaths by making *every word* holy and pure, just as he swept away the shadowy sabbath by making *every day* holy and pure. A sabbath set apart implies common days that are not set apart. If every day is lived wholly unto God, what room is there for a sabbath?—

"When that which is PERFECT is come, then that which is in part shall be done away."

So with our speech. There are no degrees of truthfulness. When Jesus put away oaths, he raised common every day speech to the high ideal of divine perfection.

"Let your yea be yea, and your nay, nay."

Picture a man whose every word is sober and pure and carefully weighed in the divine balance before utterance—a man whose speech is patterned upon all the beautiful instructions of the Spirit. Would it not be incongruous and superfluous for such to bolster his word with an oath?

We must learn to speak as if every word were uttered upon a solemn oath before God. Though we fall far short, can we not see the *infinitely desirable beauty* of this ideal.

But some will say, "Has not God Himself confirmed His Word with an oath?" True. *But we are not God.* A different purpose is to be served, and a different principle applies. For one thing, God is not upon probation in the way of righteousness. God is not being trained regarding holiness of speech. For another, God is dealing with men—the infinite with the finite—and in gracious condescension gives them added assurance because of their weakness.

God's Word does not *need* an oath to make it sure. It is no surer with an oath than without, and the more clearly we can perceive this, the better God is pleased. We are told in Proverbs 30:5—

> *"EVERY WORD of God is pure* (Revised Version: TRIED, PROVED TRUE)."

Consider how Jesus marvelled at the deep perception of the faith of the centurion (Matt. 8:8)—

> *"SPEAK THE WORD ONLY, and my servant shall be healed."*

—the simple, pure, unattested word—*What faith!* And Jesus' gentle rebuke to Thomas embodies the same principle—

> *"Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."*

There is another aspect in which oaths are not fitting for men, that does not apply to God. Jesus says further—

> *"Swear not by heaven—it is God's throne;*
> *Nor earth—it is God's footstool;*
> *Nor Jerusalem—it is God's city."*

All is God's, and only God can swear by it. Puny man has nothing and is nothing. He dare not even swear by his own head, for he cannot even change the color of one single hair of that head, says Jesus. How vividly the Master emphasizes man's utter helplessness! Who is *he* to swear by anything, as if he could control it, or his own destiny? A passing vapor—dust and ashes—

> *"Let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil."*

There is a further serious thought concerning this matter of oaths and yea and nay, into which we easily tend to slip through thoughtlessness. The world is full of *subtle substitutes* for oaths, so that the flesh may violate the spirit of the command while observing the letter.

If we examine all the common ejaculations of surprise, or excitement, or anger, or even just common emphasis, we shall usually find that they are *disguised oaths*, and concealed ways of taking God's Name in vain.

Consider such expressions as "Good gracious," "For pity's sake," "My Goodness," "For Goodness' sake," "Goodness knows."

If we have any doubt as to what these expressions mean, and where they are derived from, we need only to consult a dictionary—Webster defines "Goodness knows" as "An exclamation equivalent to "God only knows." Similarly we find many exclamations that parody curse words. "Darn," says Webster, is a euphemism for "damn." "Gee whiz" is patterned after "Jesus." "Golly," Webster tells us, is "a substitute for God."

Divinely acceptable use of the tongue is a far more serious and searching thing than we are apt to realize.

* * *

Murmuring next comes before our attention. It is very natural to complain, find fault, and be dissatisfied like spoiled children whenever things are not just exactly as we think we would like them to be. But do we realize that we are *speaking against the love and providence of God?*

Even small and passing annoyances and dissatisfactions are manifestations of carnal thinking and evidences of lack of any real faith, for the promise is (Rom. 8:28)—

> *"ALL things work together for good to them that love God."*

Either we believe that FULLY, or we do not believe it at all. There is no middle ground. How beautifully Job expresses the attitude of the spiritual mind—

> *"Shall we receive good at the hand of the Lord and shall we not receive evil? . . ."*
>
> *"Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him!"*

We may feel that we could rise to this height in some great disaster, but often a more searching test of our character comes in the little daily disappointments that catch us off guard in our natural state when we are not heroically steeled for a great and showy display of patient resignation.

But let us remember that for murmuring under trials far heavier than we have to face, Israel (says Paul) were *"destroyed of the destroyer,"* and this, he says, was an example for us. Therefore, let us—

"Do ALL things without murmurings" (Phil. 2:14).

* * *

Isaiah 29:13 expresses a complaint God had against Israel—

"This people draw near Me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor Me, but have removed their heart far from Me."

Lip-service. Are our *heart and mind* always fully with our lips in all our praise—in all our singing of hymns and attending of meetings and breaking of bread and doing of daily readings? If our minds tend to wander, then it is only an offensive mechanical lip-service that we are offering to the Great Creator upon whom we depend for every breath.

It is so fatally easy to slip into this, especially in matters like meetings and hymn singing, that have the character of repetition and familiarity.

To the prophet Jeremiah, even in the midst of his Lamentations for the destruction of his people and desolation of the land, God's mercies were seen with marvel and awe, as "new every morning" (Lam. 3:23).

We must perceive the mercy of the Creator with the same continual *freshness and vividness* and give all our heart and soul to His service, or we, too, shall fall into the rut of lip-service. The only way to keep our minds from wandering to other interests is *not to have any other interests*—to shun everything that does not properly fit into that pattern.

* * *

Harsh words call for special mention—not necessarily angry words, but just habitually, often thoughtlessly harsh words. The flesh is a harsh, coarse, irritable thing. Graciousness and gentleness do not come naturally. They are spiritual qualities.

Let us not make the sad mistake of thinking that contending for the Truth or raising children call for harsh words at any time. Gentle words can do the job much better, much more impressively, much more lastingly, and with much deeper and sweeter results in the recipient.

In both fields discipline is often required to maintain faithfulness, but harsh words are no fitting part of it. *Harsh words are ALWAYS an ugly manifestation of our own inner flesh:* we must face this fact if we hope for healthy results.

It is particularly on occasions requiring discipline that solemn, gentle, well-weighed, impressive, Spirit-guided words are so essential. Harshness can only shrivel and blight, and breed harshness in return.

The true meekness and gentleness of Christ must be consistent on *all* occasions if it is to be part of our real character and not a cloak of convenience.

"The words of a wise man's mouth are grace" (Ecc. 10:12).

True, Christ, as the mouthpiece of God, spoke scathing words of judgment that were Spirit-inspired, but we are not called to be so used and so inspired, and the pattern laid down for us is clear—

"Meekness toward all" . . . "Speak evil of none."

Expose the whole, dark, worldwide fabric of sin and error in clear and unreserved terms, by the searching light of the Spirit Word—keep carefully separate from it all in faithfulness to divine command—but *always in gentleness and mercy and hope,* for who are we to pronounce another's judgment?

* * *

We have considered the many warnings and instructions concerning the spoken and written word (for the instructions apply equally to both). Let us in closing glance at its *powers and benefits and beauties.*

First we think of the Word of God.

"In the beginning was the Word."

"By the Word of the Lord were the heavens made."

And by that Word the gracious, glorious message of life and hope came to perishing man.

And in the fulness of times the Word was made flesh. All that marvelous message and purpose was focused in the Son of God—

"And we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

And when he began his ministry of love and sacrifice among men, those who heard him—

". . . Wondered at the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth" (Lk. 4:22).

The Word of God is our great treasure—able to make us wise unto salvation (2 Tim. 3:15). Counsel concerning preserving its integrity is solemn and frequent—

"Hold fast the form of sound words" (2 Tim. 1:13).

"To the law and to the testimony, if any speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa. 8:20).

"If any man speak, let him speak as the Oracles of God."

What a vast range of good is in the power of the tongue! *Toward God*—praise, worship, thanksgiving, confession, intercession, entreaty. *Toward man*—preaching, teaching, exhorting, comforting, encouraging, warning, and rebuke—

"The lips of the righteous feed many" (Prov. 10:21).

"The mouth of a righteous man is a well of life."

"Death, and life, are in the power of the tongue."

Let us then, with firm determination, make the words of the Psalmist our own—

"I am purposed that my mouth should not transgress . . ."

"I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue . . ."

"I will keep my mouth with a bridle . . ."

"Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth . . . keep the door of my lips."

Holy and Blameless in Love

"According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love" (Eph. 1:4).

THE EPISTLE TO THE EPHESIANS

Above, and around, and through all the activities of the Ecclesia is the Mind and Power of God. All is of Him, and by Him, and for Him. As the Head, Jesus, yielded himself in all things to the will of the Father, and in turn received all his strength and wisdom and joy from Him, so must the Body do likewise. "When I am weak," Paul says elsewhere (2 Cor. 12:10), "then am I strong." This is the theme of this epistle, and indeed of all the epistles. *All things are of God.* All things are created by Him and for His purpose, and to contribute to His ultimate glorious end.

The Church, the Body of Christ, is taken from the weakest of His creatures—the low ones, the weak, the despised, the poor. Not the wise, mighty, and noble; not the able and self-reliant; none who are contaminated with the wisdom of this world, or pride, or vanity, or ambitions. "When I am weak, *then* am I strong," for—

> *"My strength* (saith the Lord) *is made perfect in weakness."*

And from this lowly human clay, God is building a temple of glory, eternal for the ages. His method is slow, gradual transformation. In little steps from one shade of glory to a brighter shade until we come to the perfect man in Christ Jesus.

The power for all this comes from God. We cannot make ourselves good or pure or holy, any more than we can make ourselves beautiful. A beautiful character is like a beautiful form—it is the work and glory of the Creator, not of itself. We present ourselves as mediums for manifestation of God's glory by allowing Him to transform us to His likeness. See how Paul emphasizes this basic fact throughout this Epistle—

> *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenly."*

These "spiritual blessings in the heavenly" are His transforming works upon us, transforming us from dross to gold—

> *"That we should be HOLY and BLAMELESS before Him."*

That is *His* work. We cannot make ourselves holy, but we *can* present ourselves to Him that *He* may make us holy. We can *want* to be holy, strive to be holy, hunger and thirst for the beauty of holiness, and He will clothe us with it, according to the mercies of His grace toward us.

"We are predestinated" (Paul continues—verse 11) *"according to the purpose of Him Who worketh all things after the counsel of His Own will, that we should be unto the praise of His glory."*

"Whom He did foreknow, He did also predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son" (Rom. 8:29).

Paul prays (v. 17) that God may give them the spirit of wisdom and revelation, and the knowledge of His exceeding power to usward, according to the working of His mighty power (verse 19). Throughout all it is God's marvelous work. "You did He make alive" (2:1), and again (v. 4)—

"For His great love wherewith He loved us, He made us alive in Christ and raised us up with him."

"It is not of yourselves (v. 8)*—it is the gift of God."*

There is the crux of the matter.

"We are HIS workmanship, created unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

In chapter 3:14, Paul again prays that they may be "strengthened with might by His (God's) spirit in the inner man," that they may be "filled with all the fulness of God" (v. 19) "according to the power that worketh in us" (v. 20).

So in these first three chapters, the first half of the epistle, Paul paints an inspiring picture of their unique and exalted position, chosen of God for the working of His purpose and manifestation of His glory—selected as the clay which the mighty power of God should slowly mould to His likeness, and then, at the last trump, transform into His very spirit substance.

And this final glorious manifestation, gradually brought to birth through the travail of the ages, will be in its completeness and unity of the SON OF GOD, born of the flesh according to the will and power of the all-pervading Spirit. It will be God's creation—HIS glory—the greatest example of the handiwork of His wisdom and omnipotence. And so Paul concludes this part of the epistle with these words (3:21) —

"Unto HIM be glory in the Ecclesia by Jesus Christ throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."

We are the clay in the hand of the Potter. We are the material. He has made us as we are, and He will make us into whatever we shall be. We ask then, Is anything expected of us? Does God just pick some here and there haphazardly for His purpose? We do not entertain that idea for a moment.

Something is expected even of the potter's clay. It must be suitable material. First and above all, it must be *workable.* Not stiff and hard and crusted. It must yield itself to the hand of the potter. Clay that was satisfied with its present shapelessness and resisted the Potter, or wanted a shape of its own, would be useless.

Then it must have sufficient consistency to hold the shape into which the Potter forms it. Flabby material is no good. *"God hath no pleasure in fools"* (Ecc. 5:4). He knows our possibilities and will not be deceived, though we deceive ourselves.

Then, to fill a useful role, the clay must pass through the fire. It must be hardened—not too much fire or it will forever be destroyed—but just that degree that is necessary to achieve the best results. The All-wise Potter knows exactly how much each vessel needs, and exactly how much each can stand.

The first half of this epistle describes God's work *in* us, and Christ's work *for* us—the glorious temple God is building—the great redemption that Christ has wrought and God freely offers to us because of the "love wherewith He loved us."

But this is not all. The last half of the epistle deals with *our* work. What we must do for God. It is all summed up in the wonderful phrase (4:30)—

"Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God."

"Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God." When we find someone is angry at our shortcomings, our resentment is aroused, and our better feelings are stifled; but when we find that our failures grieve them, then remorse gives us no peace until we overcome.

If Paul had said, "Anger not the Holy Spirit of God," the whole relationship would have changed. But God does not speak of anger to His saints. Anger is for the shortcomings of a servant, but grief is caused by the failure of a son. If it were anger, then we should sullenly seek to satisfy Him, knowing that He is stronger than we; but when He speaks to us of grief, then we must labor to please Him, and give Him joy, and remove all cause for sorrow. How much greater power has the one incentive than the other!

The first three chapters are inspiration. They describe the glory and the power. They stir us to reciprocation and we exclaim —

"What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me?" (Psa. 116:12).

Any service, kindness, or favor creates an obligation and whenever we receive any privileges or benefits, we assume a corresponding responsibility. We speak, of course, in a moral, not in a legal sense. The obligation may not necessarily be to the person who has done the kindness. In fact, the higher the degree in which this law finds expression, the further this becomes from being the case. The source of all good is God.

"Every good and perfect gift is from above."

—says James (Jam. 1:17), and again (1 Jn. 4:19)—

"We love, because He first loved us."

It comes from God to us, and then from us—if we fulfil our proper part—it radiates and diffuses in ever-widening circles. He teaches us not to do things for those who can reciprocate, but for those who cannot—they will bless His name, and He will complete the chain by blessing us. Not that we do these things for reward, but it is the working out of the great law that as we sow, so shall we reap—He that rolleth a stone, either good or ill, it will return to him, to bless or curse.

It is upon this law, in its highest form, that God's relation to us is based. He freely pours His blessings upon us, involving us in an obligation that we can never repay, but which is a lifelong incentive to effort, and a powerful stimulus to love. He does not say, "If you do this and that, then I will reward, or bless you." He says rather, "I *have* redeemed you, I *have* given you life and hope, I *have* made you sons and daughters, I HAVE LOVED YOU—therefore do these things to give Me joy and to show your love and appreciation."

"God commendeth His love toward us in that—while we were yet sinners—Christ died for us."

* * *

God does not ask us for great accomplishments. He is not an exacting Master—He is a loving Father. What does a Father ask but love, and what else can we give Him? He asks us to love Him with our whole heart and mind and soul, and to let that love pervade and direct our every act and thought and word. That is all—but that is everything. Chapter 4 begins *our* part—

"I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, BESEECH you to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called."

We note the "therefore." Because God has so loved us, *therefore* I beseech you to be worthy of that love. Then the word "beseech." It is an entreaty, not a command. No mention is made of penalty. He appeals to the best in us. John says—

> *"Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God"* (1 Jn. 3:1-3).

Then he adds—

> *"And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as HE is pure."*

WE ARE HIS SONS. WE BEAR HIS NAME!

> *"What manner of person ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness"* (2 Pet. 3:11).

Consider the solemn privileges and responsibilities of those who approached God in the natural Mosaic tabernacle—how careful they had to be of every detail! Our privileges and responsibilities are far greater than theirs. We are the living temple, we bear the name of God with us everywhere—exalting it or abasing it according to what action we take.

> *"If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die,"* says Paul (Rom. 8).

That is simple enough. If you just live an ordinary life, like ordinary people, actuated by natural motives and inclinations, *you will die.* A good life in its way, perhaps—so much the better if it is—but still at the end of it, you will die.

> *". . . But if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live."*

We must live according to a different principle. We must live for something besides ourselves. We must win a place in the heart of God, because that is what is going to endure.

If we are inspired by the love of God, and the glorious prospect of eternal fellowship with Him as our Father, we shall bend every effort to overcome those things which draw us away.

God *wants* to use us, to beautify and glorify us, to give us a place in the mansion He is building for His eternal habitation—

> *"He is not willing that any should perish"* (2 Pet. 3:9)—

—But if we live after the flesh, He cannot do any of this for us—

> *"The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other"* (Gal. 5:17).
>
> *"As many as are led by the Spirit of God—THEY are the sons of God"* (Rom. 8:14).

In the next verse of this 4th chapter, Paul begins to go into detail—

"With all lowliness and meekness."

These come first. They are the foundation. All virtue is built upon them. All else is false. These are the traits that Christ put first in his lessons of truth—

"Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly, and ye shall have rest unto your souls."

Lowliness and meekness—despised characteristics in the eyes of the world, but unto them that are called, the power of God and the wisdom of God.

"When I am weak, THEN am I strong."

When I realize my own weakness and helplessness and lowliness and ignorance—then do I feel the strength and wisdom of God.

"Blessed (that is, happy) *are the meek . . . He will beautify the meek with salvation."*

Webster defines "meek" as "Mild of temper, not easily provoked or irritated, patient under injuries, not resentful, forbearing, submissive, humble." Meekness is usually looked upon as weakness, but it should be evident to anyone who regards it in the true light that meekness demands great strength of character—"not easily provoked or irritated, patient under injuries." Anyone who has made any effort in this direction—any effort to subdue the coarse, animal passions—can testify that a full accomplishment is of godly magnitude and character.

Meekness is the first requisite of the clay—rigid control of its own passions and full submission to the hand of the Potter. The clay must be pliable, workable, teachable. Humility is the handmaid of wisdom, for to see ourselves just as we are in God's sight and to confess our position, is humility. Being such as we are, there can be no other result of true self-examination except humility. Add to this self-control, a rare and godly combination, and we have meekness—perfect material for divine manipulation.

Paul continues—

"With long-suffering, forbearing one another in love."

This last phrase "in love" is one that Paul cannot keep away from. As soon as he delves beneath the surface of any of the varied attributes or revelations of God, or of the godliness that is enjoined upon men, he finds love at the roots. A moment ago we read Webster's definition of meekness. Doubtless many

were struck by its resemblance to Paul's words in 1st Corinthians on love.

Paul here begins to analyze meekness, and he finds it is another of the blossoms that spring from the root of love. We have said that whatever Paul is considering, he cannot avoid this thought. Let us look at the Epistle—

"Holy and blameless in love" (1:4).

"Rooted and grounded in love, strong to apprehend" (3:17).

"Forbearing one another in love" (4:2).

"Speaking the truth in love" (4:15).

"The edifying of the body in love" (4:16).

"Be imitators of God and walk in love" (5:2).

It is, we find, his refrain to every teaching, every command. All God's actions are attributed to this supreme motive, and to us He always says—

"Do this in love—by—through—because of—love."

What then, is love? When we read 1st Corinthians 13 we are apt to think that we have got to the bottom of it. Here is a full explanation, we feel. Love is a combination of all the best characteristics—meekness, long-suffering, kindness, patience, etc.

But that is not true. Paul there isn't telling us what love *is*, but what it *does*. Electricity isn't light and heat and motors and dynamos—it is the POWER behind all these things.

John tells us what love *is*, and his conception is much deeper than just a combination of its manifestation. He says, "God is love." Let us go a step further. Jesus says God is Spirit. And what is spirit? Spirit is power—the power behind every power—the power in and by and through which all things exist.

The more we analyze it, the more we conclude that there is no power but true love. It is the love of God that conceived and maintains the universe in motion. This is not far-fetched. All things, we are told, were made for Christ—he is the nucleus of all. *But why was Christ made?* He was made, we are told, to be the supreme manifestation of the love of God. The whole creation is designed as the setting for the highest expression of the love of God, and the power of God.

Love is power. Power is that which does things—accomplishes things. Now clearly the highest and greatest power would be that which has the highest and greatest accomplishments.

We say that God's offering of His Son is the greatest manifestation of His power, because it accomplishes the most. It is the power by which He draws men upward and forward—the power by which He transforms them from carnal to spiritual—by which He drives out the natural and infuses them with holiness.

It is the power by which His whole purpose is moving forward. By love, God is gradually developing a host of beings who will reflect His glory and His divine attributes. Beings who, because of the divine attraction which is love, have freely chosen the hard but glorious upward ascent to Him. What power but love could accomplish this?

Love is power. God's love, we have seen, is at the bottom of all mechanical power, for it is the mainspring of the universe. But there is something else. Two thousand million people are in constant motion upon the face of the earth. What is the power behind every action that they make? It is love. Of course, it is not love in the pure and exalted sense in which we have been considering it. When Paul speaks of love, we understand him to mean holy love, the spirit or power of holiness—true love, as God intended it to be.

But the spirit of the prophets is subject to the prophets. Love can be misplaced and debased. It can be a power for evil just as for good. But still love is the power that moves every human creature in every human act. What, for instance, was it that dictated the course of Demas? *Love* of this present world. And of Diotrephes? *Love* of pre-eminence.

Repeatedly we are told: Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. We must love. All living activity is impelled by love. Loving is synonymous with living. Even in the simplest acts, we set our love upon a result, and that is the power that moves us to accomplish that result.

And here lies the vital importance of setting our affections high. We cannot create the power. God does that. We are born with power and desire and will. But we can choose in what direction that power is to move us. If we set our love on the world, we are drawn down to the world; if we set our love on ourselves, we shrivel up within ourselves.

But if we set our love on God, that marvelous power that energizes us makes contact with a greater and unearthly power—we are drawn to God and He is drawn to us, and in accordance with the universal law of magnetism, as we ap-

proach Him the attraction becomes greater and greater, until finally we are swallowed up into His substance.

"As many as receive him, to them he giveth POWER to become the sons of God" (Jn. 1:12).

We are drawn toward whatever inspires our love. That mysterious magnetism is the secret of all movement and activity. God could force us, or could teach us with cold reason. It did not need the death of Christ to persuade us that obedience to the Supreme Power of the universe is the only sensible course.

But God loved us, and He manifested that love in the most powerful way possible. Therefore we love Him, and are drawn toward Him. We want Him, not because He is Almighty and can do us a lot of good, but because He loves us and we love Him.

Every act is propelled by a drawing toward some object or end in view. We are born with this tremendous and incalculable power. See what labors men will perform, what hardships they will endure, what they will sacrifice to accomplish their ends! It is an irresistible, terrifying power, stronger than life itself, and when the magnet is brutality or gain, love is a destructive force.

But there is no magnet like the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Herein is the wisdom of God. If He appealed merely to our self-interests, there are often many stronger attractions than that. Men will give up all their self-interest and lay down their lives for a person or cause that they love.

But God holds before us the highest possible manifestation of love and power—the offering of His Son, who himself joined in that love with every fibre of his being; and looking upon him we are irresistibly drawn toward Him. Lesser powers and attractions fade—a power outside ourselves carries us forward. This attraction is divine and eternal; others are light, passing shadows.

Therefore, we see why Paul so strongly emphasizes the necessity of looking upon Him—turning our hearts and minds in His direction—setting our affections upon Him—allowing his light free course into our souls—bringing ourselves into the focus of His glory—directing the mighty inborn power of love toward the fountain of holiness, and permitting nothing to obscure the vision or blot out the light.

So we find the power that He has given us to become the sons of God, and that power is love. We must love these things—*and they are ours.* We can be rooted and grounded by

the power of love. We can forbear one another, be bold to speak the Truth, edify the Body, walk in the steps of God, all by the power that He has given us, the secret of which is love.

In his final words, after divers exhortations, Paul closes the epistle with a vision of this two-way current of transforming power still before him—

> *"Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ . . ."*
>
> *"Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ with an imperishable love."*

Be Ye Therefore Perfect

"Ye are my friends, IF ye do whatsoever I command you" (Jn. 15:14).

MATTHEW CHAPTERS FIVE TO SEVEN

I have been always strongly impressed that these three chapters are the living and vital heart of the Truth. If we are familiar with these teachings and sincerely trying to obey them at all times, we are on the way of life. *If we are not, we have no chance of life.*

These three chapters, commonly known as the "Sermon on the Mount," contain forty commands. They are presented in various ways, but are all actually commands of Christ, to which he refers when he says (Jn. 15:14)—

"Ye are my friends, IF ye do whatsoever I command you."

He sums it all up in his final words. If we hear and do, we build on rock, and will stand forever. If we hear and do not, we build on sand—our house will collapse and fall.

Let us consider some of these commands in order—

"Blessed are the poor in spirit."

Or, as a command—

"Be poor in spirit."

This is perhaps the most striking command of the whole address. The word "poor" here means the lowest degree of abject poverty and destitution. It means beggar.

"Spirit" is disposition. The "poor in spirit" are those who fully realize the true destitute status of perishing mortal man, as compared to glorious and eternal things. What is man?—dust, a vapor, a breath, a shadow, with an urgent, desperate, crying need for the help and strength of God.

Those who perceive this are blessed, happy; they have taken the first step toward immortality.

* * *

"Blessed are they that mourn."

Or, more simply—

"Be mourners."

The blessing does not include ALL mourners, any more than the first does all poor. It is those who mourn in the *right* way for the *right* things; those who have deep fellow-feeling for others' sorrows—for the burden of the sorrow of this sad world; those who realistically face the facts of life—

"It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting:"

"For that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart" (Ecc. 7:2).

It does not conflict with the command to "Always rejoice!" Paul said (2 Cor. 6:10) that he was "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich."

* * *

"Be meek" (5:5).

Meek means yielding, gentle, mild, patient, calm, and soothing; not aggressive or self-assertive or bossy; cheerfully putting up with wrong and present disadvantages for the sake of eternal good.

Meek people are self-controlled people and they have great power for good influence. It is a training in controlling the flesh. It is the attitude that can best help others.

* * *

"Hunger and thirst after righteousness" (5:6).

Hunger and thirst—the basic, most essential needs and desires. The blessing is for those whose whole hearts' desire is not for personal gain or advantage or pleasure, but for righteousness and holiness and godliness—in themselves and throughout the earth.

* * *

"Be merciful" (5:7).

In Nazareth Revisited, bro. Roberts strongly emphasizes the necessity of keeping all these teachings in balance. We may tend to over-emphasize those that naturally appeal to us, and give others insufficient weight.

An adamant, forceful stand for righteousness is essential, but equally so is mercy and compassion and patience and understanding. We are fighting sin—the common enemy. We are not fighting people. People we are trying to win and save.

WE NATURALLY TEND TO BE VERY CRITICAL OF THE ERRORS OF OTHERS, AND VERY COMPASSIONATE TO OUR OWN. LET US REVERSE THE PROCESS. IT IS MUCH MORE HEALTHY AND PRODUCTIVE AND SCRIPTURAL.

* * *

"Be pure in heart" (5:8).

The saddest aspect of the perverted morality of these last dark days of human ignorance is that corruption and vulgarity are being glorified as reality and honesty, and deeper bondage

to the flesh is heralded as emancipation and freedom. Decency and purity are condemned as prudery and hypocrisy.

Truly the world is full of hypocrisy, as the new generation of rebels says, but the problem is not solved but worsened by destroying the good things that the world is hypocritical about.

More than ever it is essential that we, as Christ's brethren, realize and emphasize that purity and cleanliness of heart and deed and word and thought are as vital and important and desirable and timely as ever.

The Bible— God's Word— is the ONLY standard of right and wrong, purity and impurity, cleanliness and filthiness, wisdom and folly. Without this standard, man steadily degenerates to the beast, though he glorifies his corruption with high sounding words.

* * *

"Be peacemakers" (5:9).

Peace can only be built on one foundation: *"FIRST pure; THEN peaceable."*

"The work of RIGHTEOUSNESS shall be peace" (Isa. 32:17).

"There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked."

But the emphasis here is on the desire and effort for peace and harmony and reconciliation: the basic bent of the mind— developed through meditation on God's Word—to seek to harmonize conflicts, to reconcile estrangements, to remove barriers of misunderstanding and enmity. To accomplish these things, there must be complete renunciation of self and personal desire.

Christ in perfect self-sacrifice, made peace by the blood of the cross, reconciling and uniting Jew and Gentile in one New Man in himself.

He is the great example of bringing reconciliation to others by personal holiness in himself. He reconciled men to each other, and mankind to God.

* * *

"Rejoice and be exceeding glad when you are privileged to suffer for righteousness' sake, for great is your reward in heaven."

Suffering is not to be rejoiced in for its own sake, or from self-pity. That, though common, is fleshly perversion. It is to be healthily and intelligently rejoiced in as a necessary means to a glorious end—as an assurance and evidence that God is working in us and through us to accomplish His divine purpose.

"Be ye the salt of the earth."

Our responsibility in all we do or say is to be an element of purity and soundness in an increasingly corrupt and degenerating world.

We are to be the element that keeps God from destroying the whole, as in the Flood, or Sodom and Gomorrha.

But if the salt has lost its freshness and tangy saltiness, what good is it? This is our zeal and dedication and fervent activity for good toward all, without which we are nothing.

* * *

"Be ye the light of the world."

A high commission indeed! Similar to the salt, but a different aspect. The salt is the preserving influence, the inner striving and prayer, the life of godliness and purity.

The light is the manifestation, the guidance, the enlightenment, the beacon pointing the way in the darkness of human night.

Let your light shine that men may glorify God. Our lives and testimonies must be a manifestation to lost and groping mankind of the reality and desirability and *beauty* of holiness.

* * *

"Think not that I am come to destroy the Law" (5:17).

The Law of Moses demanded perfect holiness. The Law drew a sharp line between clean and unclean. The Law, said Paul, was "holy, just and good."

The common idea is that Christ came to lower the requirements, so that man could get life with less effort and less inconvenience— to sweep away all the flesh-crucifying rules under a big, blind, blurred blanket of tolerance and indulgence, falsely described as "love."

NOTHING COULD BE FURTHER FROM THE TRUTH—

"Whoso shall break one of the least of these commandments shall be called least in the Kingdom of Heaven" (5:19).

"Except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the Kingdom of heaven" (5:20).

In the eyes of the people, the Scribes and Pharisees were the very pinnacle of righteousness, but it was a superficial and external fulfilling of the Law. Jesus is about to expound a deeper, infinitely more searching and piercing law. He is going to bring out the real spirit of the Mosaic Law, showing how much further it goes with its commands into the innermost heart of man.

"But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother (without a cause) shall be in danger of the judgment" (5:22).

The Law says, "Thou shalt not kill." I say, in expounding the Spirit of the Law, that *thou shalt not be angry at anyone,* for anger is simply murder locked up in the heart.

"Without a cause" is not in the best manuscripts. The Revised Version and Diaglott and all modern versions omit it. It destroys the whole force of the command. The command is not—

"Thou shalt not be angry without a cause."

But—

"Thou shalt not be angry—Period."

Anger is the prerogative of God, and we are not God.

In man, anger is loss of control, loss of perspective, a victory for the mind of the flesh. We can accomplish nothing good when we are angry. We lose all influence for good. Anger is infantile immaturity—

"The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God."

* * *

"Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee;"

"Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift."

If you are aware that your brother has anything against you; is in any way estranged or upset (regardless of whether it is justified or not); the command of Christ is, "BE RECONCILED."

Jesus does not discuss where the fault may lie. That is unimportant. The important part is— Seek reconciliation, continually, always. Not just go through the motions once or twice, like a technical Pharisee. He says—BE reconciled: keep at it; never give up the effort.

IF THESE COMMANDS WERE OBEYED, THERE COULD BE NO ECCLESIAL PROBLEMS. IF THEY ARE NOT OBEYED, SAYS CHRIST, WE ARE JUST BUILDING ALL OF OUR LIFE-LONG EFFORTS ON THE SAND OF THE FLESH.

* * *

"If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out" (5:29-30).

In all these commands, we must get at the deep principles that underlie them. They are all far deeper and more broadly

applicable than the specific form in which they are worded. But this does not lessen their power, but enforces it.

Christ here is clearly using the right eye and right hand to emphasize the extreme urgency of putting away ANYTHING, however precious to us, that might hinder us in the race for life.

This principle, faithfully carried out, would eliminate many, many things from our encumbered lives, and release much time and money and energy for the work of the Lord. Are we building on rock or sand?

* * *

"Swear not at all. Let your communication be Yea, yea and Nay, nay" (5:34-37).

Various reasons are given. One is the complete helplessness of weak, mortal man to control anything or make any certain determination for the future. But the deepest reason—

"For whatsoever is more than this—a simple affirmative—cometh of evil."

Speech is a very important aspect of godliness. Control of the tongue is essential to pleasing God. We must learn that EVERY word we utter is important and related to our salvation—

"For every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof at the judgment."

What a terrible volume of condemnation we are building up for ourselves with our idle and often malicious chatter!

If we hope for life, every word must be carefully checked and weighed.

* * *

"Resist not evil" (5:39).

This goes very, very deep. Of all the commands this is perhaps the most directly contrary to both the reactions and the wisdom of the flesh.

Why not resist evil? Why not rather fight evil with every possible means available?

First, because it is so commanded. We must obey rather than question. But still we must question to the extent of trying to get the fullest value and purpose of the command.

The present world is built on violence. All governments were established by violence. If we resort to any force, or even *threat* of force, we are identifying ourselves with the violent world, the "Kingdom of men."

WE ARE MAKING THEIR VIOLENCE OUR TOOL AND ALLY. THE THREAT OF NAKED VIOLENCE LIES BEHIND ALL THE WORLD'S "LEGAL" PROCESSES, AND GIVES THEM POWER.

We are called out to be separate—harmless sheep in the midst of a world of wolves.

The fact that this command to resist not evil is directly opposed to the strongest and most vicious motion of the flesh is one big, obvious reason for the command. The whole purpose of our present probation is to overcome the flesh and train the Spirit.

But there is a deeper and more constructive and positive reason. It is given in verse 45—

"That ye may be the children of your Father, for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good."

WHY does God send His rain on the just and on the unjust? Because His present loving purpose is to call men to life, to call sinners to repentance. And to be His children, this must be OUR whole purpose of life. Everything must be subordinated to this, for the present.

There are two ways of life—the way of self-assertion and self-advantage; and the way of manifesting love and goodness toward all with a view to awakening love and goodness.

We cannot be half-and-half. We must make our choice between them. Christ is the perfect example of the way of love. He went through life completely unselfish, completely unresisting, and he has had more influence for good than all other men put together.

The non-resistant, Christlike life is the ONLY pattern of life, if we desire to do eternal good. Truly a time of judgment upon evil will come, and if we are worthy, we shall be used with Christ to carry out God's will at that time, and establish the universal triumph of righteousness, but our present duty is to try to win men to God by the Christlike way of good for evil.

* * *

"If any sue thee at the law, and take thy coat, let him have thy cloak also" (5:40).

Not just resist not evil, but give to the evil more than they demand. Is it folly? Or is it the highest and most beautiful spiritual wisdom, so far above the mind of the flesh that the flesh cannot even comprehend it?

Do we—in deed, word, and thought—obey this command to yield to the evil more than they take from us? Or are we still foolishly building on the sand of worldly thinking?

* * *

"Give to him that asketh of thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away" (5:41).

SOME DAY, PERHAPS VERY SOON, WE MUST FACE THE MAN WHO GAVE US THESE COMMANDS, AND WHO SAID HE WOULD MEASURE OUR LOVE FOR HIM BY THEM.

We know in our heart whether we are being obedient to them, or whether we are allowing the mind of the flesh to water them down and explain them away, or ignore them altogether.

* * *

"Love your enemies; bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you; pray for them that persecute you" (5:44).

These are very wonderful, powerful words. Many have been won from evil to the way of life by a Christlike example. Infinitely many more, of course, have not, but they do not count. They are just part of the perishing background of the glorious divine plan.

God is drawing a precious few out of the innumerable multitudes of the ages unto Himself, and the magnet is this free, glorious, unmerited, spiritual love of which we are called to be a part.

* * *

"Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect" (5:48).

Does he really ***expect*** us to be perfect? What he expects—what he DEMANDS—is that we strain every effort in that direction. He requires no more than the very best we can do, but he will accept no less.

The command leaves us absolutely no excuse for relaxing our efforts at any point short of perfection. The great example that is set before us in this verse is GOD HIMSELF, and as those who aspire and claim to be His children, we must always strive to be like Him.

* * *

"Take heed"—be very careful—*"that ye do not your alms before men: let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth."*

Some, in justification of parading their virtues, have tried to see a contradiction between this command and the one to—

"Let your light so shine that men may see your good works and glorify your Father."

But the wise will see no contradiction. The light must shine. We must manifest to men at every moment and in every contact the best example we can of the Christlike life.

But in the matter of doing individual good to others, every effort must be made at privacy and secrecy.

Why? The reason given is, "Otherwise ye have NO REWARD of your Father." Why not, if we are sincerely trying to do good to others, as commanded? Because (v. 2) such as do it openly have their reward already.

All who have studied the human heart—both their own and others—in the light of God's Word, will recognize that any avoidable publicity of good deeds has an element of self-glory which immediately makes it ugly and offensive to God.

* * *

"When thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and pray to thy Father in secret" (6:5).

The same with prayer. Personal prayer should be in utter privacy. The slightest trace of display or show is abomination.

* * *

"When ye pray use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do; for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking."

And public prayer, especially, should be simple, brief and unembellished. Mere repetition, he says, is vain and worldly. We must always remember, with deep reverence, that we are talking to God in reality and sincerity, and not giving a public performance to influence and impress others.

* * *

"Forgive men their trespasses."

We must forgive—freely and fully, from the heart. This is absolutely essential to a Christlike character. Ill-feeling and resentment and taking offense and unforgivingness and fleshly sourness make divine beauty of character utterly impossible.

And we must forgive EVERYTHING—whether forgiveness is sought or not. It is very self-gratifying to graciously forgive when forgiveness is asked in repentant humility. There is little virtue in forgiving under those conditions. But Christ prayed for forgiveness for those who were in the act of putting him to a cruel death, and Stephen did the same.

* * *

"Moreover, when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast."

"Verily I say unto you, They have their reward" (6:16).

Fasting comes under the same instruction of privacy, and this principle is all-inclusive. Any self-denial or sacrifice for

the sake of service to Christ must be secret to have any value in God's sight.

* * *

> *"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, for where your treasure is there will your heart be also"* (6:19-23).

This is perhaps the most comprehensive and searching of the commands, as it deals with the whole direction and motive and purpose of life.

"Treasure on earth" is ANYTHING related to the present, passing, mortal life.

The natural way is to accumulate treasure of many different kinds. This is so universally taken for granted as the wise and profitable thing to do that to question it is heresy, and to violate it is considered the height of stupidity.

Christ completely cuts the foundation out from under the whole natural pattern of life.

Verses 21-23 are an explanation of the importance of singlemindedness, as related to where our treasure in life is. The natural desire is to want treasure both in heaven AND on earth—to seek both salvation and present advantage. But Jesus says—

> *"If thine eye be single, thy body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil,* or double, *thy whole body shall be full of darkness."*

Singlemindedness is the only true enlightenment and peace. We must decide whether we want heavenly things or earthly things: we cannot have both—

> *"A doubleminded man is unstable in all his ways. Let not that man think he shall receive ANYTHING of the Lord"* (Jam. 1:7-8).

* * *

The next command is even more specifically to the point—

> *"No man can serve two masters . . . ye cannot serve God and mammon"* (6:24).

"Mammon" simply means riches, wealth, present gain, worldly things. We can be of no use or desirability to God unless we are entirely devoted to HIM to the exclusion of everything else.

Everything else—ALL natural things—must be very secondary and very unimportant to us, in order to please God. Therefore—

> *"Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, what ye shall drink, or what ye shall put on. For all these things the Gentiles*—the people of the world— *seek"* (6:25-32).

God wants us to be very different from the world, with our minds on very different things.

It does not mean we need not work to provide these things. Paul is the best example of what Jesus means here. Paul labored diligently to provide for necessary things, not only for himself but for others also; and he commanded that if a man refused work, he should not be given food.

But these daily things had no interest or importance to him except as basic necessities that had to be taken care of. And in his utter devotion to the work of God he says he was often hungry, thirsty, ill-clothed, and sleepless.

* * *

"Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness."

This must be the center of all our interest and desire. This is the pure and single eye, the body full of joy and light.

* * *

"Take therefore no thought for the morrow" (6:34).

We know that reasonable plans must be made, especially where other people's welfare and convenience are concerned. We find Paul planning where he will go and whom he will meet. But he manifests no concern about providing for his own future support or welfare. The basic principles are clear, and the more firmly we lay hold of them, the closer we are to life.

The future is entirely in God's hands.

He has guaranteed to take care of His children.

Today alone is our concern.

We must, today, use what He has given us in His work, having faith in Him to provide for the future. He guarantees care in the future ONLY if we properly use today.

* * *

"Judge not, that ye be not judged" (7:1).

Probably no command is more often broken than this. Much of our conversation is judgment, criticism, or condemnation of others.

This is an evil condition, and displeasing to God. We must truly judge circumstances and conditions where our own conduct is affected, or where fellowship is involved; but unless it is necessary for us to judge others in order to know what we ourselves should do, we should very carefully refrain from forming any judgment of another, and especially we should not express judgment.

THIS IS A VERY IMPORTANT FIRST PRINCIPLE OF THE TRUTH. THE WARNING IS—

"With what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged" (7:2).

Therefore, it is always wisdom to judge with mercy and kindness and compassion and fellow-feeling, wherever we must judge at all.

When we indulge in the flesh-satisfying practice of judging and criticizing others, we are not only directly disobedient to this command—we are also manifesting that we do not have the mind and spirit of Christ, and therefore are none of his.

* * *

"Give not that which is holy unto dogs" (7:6).

This seems to be a counterbalance to the command not to judge. It parallels another command elsewhere—

"Be wise as serpents, and harmless as doves."

We are not being harmless, but very harmful and fleshly, when we talk about the faults of others.

But though we must view all with love and compassion and sympathy, still we must use care in exposing the things of God to the unholy and profane.

I believe the reference is more to the inner aspects of the Truth, the intimate aspects of association and fellowship, rather than to preaching the Truth. Paul's injunction to "Lay hands suddenly on no man" would be parallel.

This is a fitting and balancing warning in conjunction with the command to judge with compassion, lest out of misguided love we make the mistake of being too lenient in guarding the purity of the Truth. The Truth and the fellowship of the Spirit are holy and sacred and must be jealously guarded from the worldly and profane.

* * *

"Ask, and it SHALL be given you."

This is certainly the most glorious of the commands. Let us note well that it is a COMMAND. We must believe it, and we must ask.

WE CAN NEVER HIDE BEHIND A PLEA OF WEAKNESS OR INABILITY TO OBEY, FOR HERE WE ARE COMMANDED TO ASK FOR WHATEVER STRENGTH AND WISDOM WE NEED, AND GOD GUARANTEES IT (Mk. 11:24)—

"What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, BELIEVE that ye receive them, and ye SHALL have them."

With that guarantee of success, there can be no excuse for failure.

* * *

"All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets" (7:12).

The "Golden Rule"—best known and perhaps least obeyed command of all. It has a pleasing, soothing sound, and many pay it zealous lip-service, but how rarely it is practiced!

Note that Jesus says this command is "all the Law and the Prophets"—this is the whole spirit of the Old Testament, as well as the New.

* * *

"Enter ye in at the strait (that is, narrow) *gate, for few there be that find it"* (7:13).

The Golden Rule has summed up the spirit of all the previous commands, of all the Word of God. Now comes the urgent exhortation to FOLLOW this heavenly way of wisdom, joy, and life that he has outlined, though the vast majority are going the opposite way.

The information that few will ever find the way of life, though terribly saddening, is a tremendous revelation and emancipation.

It completely frees us from what would otherwise be the almost insurmountable barrier of finding ourselves going in the opposite direction from all the learned and powerful—

"Thou has hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes" (Matt. 11:25).

The Scriptures teach us that the majority, and especially the wise and powerful, have ALWAYS been wrong concerning the real facts of life and eternity—blind guides of the blind, leading their pitiful victims only to the grave.

And thus the final command and urgent warning—

"Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. "Ye shall know them by their fruits" (7:15-20).

Here is a place where we *MUST* judge—not in condemnation, but in self-protective discernment—care concerning being misled into association with such as have all the appearances of zealous, harmless, hard-working sheep.

How are we to judge?—*"BY THEIR FRUITS."*

Now, many apparent "fruits" we may find the sheep and wolves have in common—

"Have we not prophesied in thy Name?"
"And in thy Name done many wonderful works?"

We must search deeper to discern the wolves. We would perhaps prefer not to face this issue, but to leave all judging to Christ. But here is the last and crowning command—*"Beware of false prophets."*

It must be very urgent to be put as the closing warning. It would not be faithful to ignore it. It must be a real danger.

We must endeavor, whatever the present cost in friendship and association, to faithfully keep that which has been entrusted to us, and which previous generations of faithful brethren have preserved and defended. Where false teaching is tolerated, there can be no true fellowship, though many may themselves not follow the falsehood.

* * *

Jesus closes with the two builders; one on Rock, one on Sand.

The builders on the Rock are those very few who hear these wonderful teachings of Christ and faithfully OBEY them, even to the end.

This Test of Love

Corinth was a large, thriving, modern city. The pride of life was far more catered for and excited than in the smaller, simpler communities where Paul labored. The believers there were in constant contact with the spirit of frantic bustle and grasping ambition, which such an environment develops. Prestige and worldly success and a show of surface wisdom glittered constantly before them and a great depth of spiritual perception was necessary to withstand its seduction.

This peculiarity of circumstance is reflected in Paul's letters to them. His very first message, 1st Corinthians, chapters 1 and 2, is devoted to showing the worthlessness, from an eternal viewpoint, of all the vaunted wisdom and accomplishments of the world. The eternal viewpoint is the only mature and intelligent one, and by that viewpoint—which the world glosses over and refuses to face—all temporal acquisitions and productions are merely childish and time-wasting follies.

The Corinthians tended to glory in appearances and in men who made a good show after the flesh. This led them to look down on Paul, who was a laboring man with no worldly position or flesh-pleasing qualities. Paul purposely humbled and abased himself that he might get near to the poor and simple, and he carefully avoided any appeal to fleshly motive. His great concern was to ground the believers in spiritual things, that they might rest on a solid, eternal foundation.

He said to them—

> *"Learn in us not to think above that which is written";* that is, *"Be not highminded but learn the true scriptural course from our example . . . Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us . . . We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honorable, but we are despised. Even to this present hour we both hunger and thirst, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwellingplace: and labor, working with our own hands . . . I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you . . . Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me"* (1 Cor. 4).

This was their relationship. A prosperous self-satisfied ecclesia, rich, honored and respected—a despised, destitute and humble apostle. They judged by appearances and had not the perception to see that, in the eternal purpose of God and

in spiritual values, they were pigmies compared to the giant stature of Paul.

This is the background discernable throughout his letters to them, and it comes out particularly in two chapters (2 Cor. ch. 10-11).—

"Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ."

He tries to awaken them to the fact that the house of God is not built according to worldly standards, but that its strength and glory lies in meekness and gentleness and service.

"Whosoever will be great among you," said Jesus, Let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant" (Matt. 20; 2 Cor. 10).

The way of the world is so ingrained in the flesh that unless we are very careful and alert we take it for granted as the starting point of our reasoning. But God's way is entirely different.

God attaches so much value to loving freewill and individual spiritual enlightenment that He has permitted 6,000 years of violence and wickedness in order that out of this fiery crucible a few divine characters may be developed for His eternal pleasure and glory.

This we must always bear in mind. The end could superficially be accomplished a thousand times more easily by enforced regimentation but the vital spark of freewill would be destroyed.

Paul was ever mindful of this one great principle. He says—

"Our authority, which the Lord hath given us for your edification, and not for your destruction."

Paul had great authority. He could strike a man blind with a word when the service of the Gospel required it.

How easy it would have been to use it to bring these shortsighted, rebellious ecclesias into line! But Paul knew, as Jesus knew with the limitless power of the Spirit upon him, and all the kingdoms of the earth stretched before him, that there is only one way that can build with endurance, and it is not the way of force.

He knew that though he could easily silence all opposition and make a big showing in the eyes of the flesh, he would gain nothing this way for God. He knew that only quiet and persistent patience and love could develop what he was seeking to develop—a people prepared for the Lord. This was

a very slow and unspectacular work, and exposed Paul constantly to the charge of timidity and weakness.

He spoke of the possibility of having to use his authority with some, but he knew that this would be, at best, a necessary evil—a step backward—a confession that in their case, love had failed to penetrate and persuade. It would be lost ground in the development of the eternal purpose.

> *"Though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh."*

This is what his opponents could not realize. They did not understand the end to which he was driving. He was trying, by the enlightenment of the Spirit, to create freewill desire to draw near to God. Neither force nor fleshly appeal—the two motives they understood—could accomplish this purpose.

> *"Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."*

These were the strongholds against which he was waging war. He could see them clearly, although those who were afflicted with them could not. They exist in every heart and mind. He knew where the trouble in Corinth lay, and he knew the only way to correct it, if it ever was to be corrected, and he had to reach their heart to do it.

Each victory must be an individual one. One at a time he would win them over. He was laboring, as he said, to bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. He knew that any victory less than this was a hollow one, not worth winning, for it would not be reaching deep enough. He knew that if he could not convince and inspire them to the point of eager, anxious submission to the will of God in all things, then he had not really won them at all, and though superficially "in the Truth" they were still outside the life-giving grace of God.

Therefore, in spite of the taunts of those who dared him to use his boasted authority, he patiently continued to beseech them by the meekness and gentleness of Christ.

> *"They, measuring themselves by themselves and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise."*

Expressed clearly in this way, the folly of this course is obvious. For measurement to have any meaning at all it must be according to a recognized and unchanging standard. There is no point in measuring two things against each other when the measurements of both are in question. Therefore, we can never measure

one brother against another, or one ecclesia against another. Just because one exceeds the other will be no proof that either is acceptable or begins to measure up to the true standard.

There is only one true rule of measurement, and that is the standard God has laid down. It is a humiliating standard for the flesh. Many complain that it is very discouraging to measure things by this standard, but still it is the only safe and scriptural course. "If we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged," Paul tells them; and James says, "So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the perfect law of liberty"—the law of perfection that will bring liberty to those that love it—(1 Cor. 11:31; Jam. 1:25; 2:12).

Let us never be afraid of facing the true measurement, but rather seek it and apply it daily, ever striving, in the power of God, to attain to the full stature of the perfect man in Christ Jesus. Let us talk no more of discouragement, but let us glory in the exalted standards God has set—the standards to which, it is promised, we shall some day attain, if we now strive toward them and confess their truth and desirability, and do not attempt to confuse and obscure them to satisfy the flesh.

God will give us no reward we have not honestly labored toward. He will not force perfection upon us if we do not strive after it now.

"He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."

There is nothing to glory of outside of God; all outside of God is shame. There are only two kinds of activity—that which is done through God and that which is done contrary to God. In the former, the glory is clearly God's—in the latter, there is no glory at all. There may appear a range of neutral ground between, but the Scriptures rule this out and tell us that what we do not consciously bring into the first category must necessarily fall into the second.

And Paul concludes—

"For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth."

Those whom the Lord commends are simply those that follow the course He commends according to His standards, for *"God is no respecter of persons."*

"But I fear, lest by any means, . . . your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ" (2 Cor. 11:3).

Real truth is always simple. The deep things of God, though profound, are not complicated. Learning to know God is a

gradual process of simplification—of learning the basic principles and the underlying harmony of countless, apparently unrelated circumstances. The more clearly the picture is seen, the simpler it appears to be.

Simple Scriptural knowledge will clear away all the complicated errors of speculation. The case Paul cites is to the point. The command to Adam and Eve was very clear and simple. The serpent went to work on it and soon had it complicated by half-truths and unrevealed speculations, appealing to the mind of the flesh. The clear issue between obeying God and disobeying Him was lost sight of, and Eve was beguiled. If she had refused to be drawn away from the simple truth, she would have been safe.

Paul warningly speaks of "another Jesus." What is "another Jesus?" Clearly it means attaching a meaning to the name and personality that is not in harmony with the revealed facts. The name Jesus is on every tongue, but how many really know Jesus? How easy it is to have a form of words without any true conception behind it! We cannot know Jesus without continually reading and thinking upon what is written about him. Mere familiarity with the name and a few surface facts is useless. We must be intimately familiar with the person for whom the name stands. And this familiarity must be actual. It must arise from the fulfillment of the promise—"If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him." Although this is spiritual, it is still actual, and must happen if there is to be any hope of salvation—(Jn. 14).

> *"Though I be rude in speech, yet not in knowledge; but we have thoroughly been made manifest among you in all things."*

They had ample evidence of Paul's genuineness and the harmony of his teaching with the Truth. They knew that all he said was true. Why were they then against him? As he said earlier, "We write none other things unto you, than what ye read or acknowledge." They could not deny this. They had to admit he was a faithful teacher of the Truth. How then did they justify their antagonism? By objecting to his manner. In this way they hoped to confuse and side-track the main issue and thereby escape the force of his words.

> *"What I do, that will I do, that I may cut off occasion from them that desire occasion."*

This is an important rule of action.

> *"All things are lawful, but all things are not expedient."*

"Judge this rather," Paul says elsewhere *"that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way. Destroy not him with thy meat for whom Christ died. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for that man who eateth with offense."*

It is an evil thing to do anything that unnecessarily offends others or causes them to stumble. Here is a searching test of a man's comprehension of the second commandment, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." John says, "He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him"—nothing that gives sorrow to his brother or grounds for reproach to the adversary—(Rom. 14; 1 Jn. 2).

Jesus and the Spirit-guided apostles attached great importance to this test of love—the careful avoidance of any occasion of friction or offence. A faithful obedience to this command—and it is a positive command—would eliminate most if not all ecclesial sorrow.

The whole law, says Jesus, hangs upon two great commandments—love to God and love to neighbor. John says that if the second is not obeyed, this is proof that a claim to the first is simply a lie: "If a man say I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar"—(1 Jn. 4). Hating here means failing to love in the Scriptural sense—this is clear from the rest of the verse. Here is a very present and practical test of our profession. The test goes into action when it conflicts with our own desires.

As long as it runs in the same channel as our desires it is no test at all. As Jesus says, even sinners do that much. There is much meaningless self-congratulation for doing things that are in full harmony with our natural inclinations. There is no need for self-deception. The Scriptures offer many searching tests which the wise man will apply, regardless of the offence to his vanity or complacency. A few such tests, honestly applied, will reveal how little we are doing for God, and how much labor we cheerfully exert for ourselves.

Paul was willing to give up meat if his partaking of it offended his brother. We know he was sincere for he had already given up practically everything else that men consider makes life worth while. And a large part of the return he received from those for whom he labored was ridicule and repudiation and abuse. He nursed the ecclesias into life, and as soon as they became self-supporting many of them cast him aside. Beside the reactions in such places as Corinth and Galatia as revealed in his epistles, we have his words at one time that "All Asia is

turned away from me," at the very time he needed their comfort and support—(2 Tim. 1).

If meeting a few brethren on his prison journey to Rome caused him to thank God and take courage, what must have been the effect of the wholesale forsaking in his hour of need by those for whom he had suffered?

But we do not pity Paul. We rather pity those who had not the faith and courage to stand with him. We do not pity Paul as he stands before the condescending scorn of these self-satisfied Corinthians and pleads meekly with them, but we do marvel at the blindness and ignorance of such men claiming to know and love the Truth.

They just did not know it. That is all we can conclude. The Truth is pre-eminently a matter of the heart and character. The doctrine, though essential, is just the outer shell. The Truth is a matter of gentleness and meekness and patience and love, of service and sacrifice and spiritual transformation.

It is impossible to know the Truth without being transformed by it, for that is what knowing it means. People who bicker and quarrel and follow the flesh just do not know the Truth, and there is no use pretending they do.

The heart of the Truth is loving God, and the test of loving God is loving our brother, and loving our brother means making the avoidance of offending him our first concern. We may not have all the deeper doctrines at our finger-tips, but if we haven't got this, we haven't even begun.

Let us free ourselves from the common but deadly misconception that "knowing the Truth" means simply a mental acquaintance with the facts of revelation. If such knowledge doesn't produce a startling and revolutionary change of character and outlook and activity, then it simply has failed its whole purpose and has become merely a "savor of death unto death"—a "ministry of condemnation."

Let us, if we are inclined to measure ourselves by others, measure ourselves by the stature and experiences of this humble servant of Christ. Let us do it repeatedly whenever the flesh is inclined to whisper congratulations for some puny accomplishment. Let us get a true and healthy perspective.

"Bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ"

—is what Paul labored for among the Corinthian believers. He would not be diverted from this goal. This was the "mark of the

high calling of God in Christ Jesus" to which he patiently and earnestly pressed forward.

At the beginning of his first letter he said—

> *"I beseech you that ye all speak the same thing—that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."*

The only way this can be accomplished is, as he says, to—

> *"Bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."*

The essential unity of the body, without which it cannot live and thrive, depends upon a free will allegiance of each member to the one divine rule of judgment. The opposition of any to any part of the revealed divine mind makes unity impossible.

This is the one characteristic that distinguishes the Ecclesia of God from all human organizations—the mind of God as the basis of union and source of unity. Each member of the body, therefore, shares in the responsibility for the unity and health of the whole, and must make it his primary aim in life to develop and preserve that essential unity on divine things. "If any man speak," says the Apostle, "let him speak as the oracles of God." Within those oracles is unity, and if it is ever to be found it must be found there. Everything outside of them is chaos.

Living Sacrifice

"The Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit" (Rom. 8:26-27).

From Adam, we have the law of sin in our members, and we are also all sinners ourselves—

"All have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23).

It is God's law that (Heb. 9:22)—

"Without the shedding of blood is no remission—forgiveness—of sin."

Why? Because sin is a destructive, infectious plague that cannot be ignored. It must be dealt with and eradicated. The sacrifice of Christ is God's way of dealing with this plague, and eventually removing it completely from the earth.

It is not a magic wand, or just a technical ritual. It is not just a form of words, or an arbitrary arrangement, or a rubber stamp. It is a practical method, an orderly procedure, a beautiful, effective contrivance of divine love and wisdom.

Christ—that is, of course, God in Christ—laid the essential foundation: something we ourselves could not do. He was specially provided and specially strengthened to do that work. *We* are required to build our own salvation on that foundation—

"Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12).

The promise of life is to "him that *overcometh*" (seven times in Revelation 2 and 3). Whatever that means, it clearly means that we must *do* something, we must *accomplish* a certain task, we must achieve a certain victory—on Christ's foundation, and with God's help.

* * *

, The eternal principles of holiness, righteousness, justice, and truth required a perfect sacrifice for sin, a perfect condemnation of sin and upholding of holiness, to lay a sound foundation for the extention of God's mercy to fallen mankind. God and His holy law of life had to be honored and vindicated—openly, publicly, eternally. This was done in the crucifixion of sin's flesh on the cross—a voluntary cooperation and manifestation of joint love by God and Christ for mankind.

Christ's perfect lifelong obedience and sacrificial death provided one real, sound, holy, perfect man out of the whole

race of fallen mankind, in whom and upon whom God could build His divine family. Until Christ destroyed the devil in himself on the cross, he was not the completed, purified, victorious man that God required as the foundation of His plan—

> *"That through death he* (Jesus) *might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil"* (Heb. 2:14).

All his life he held the devil within himself completely powerless by the strength of his perfect love and perfect obedience. But that war had to be brought to a climax and settlement. Sin, the devil, had to be not only held off, held powerless, but utterly destroyed.

It must be a sacrificial death—a voluntary, obedient submitting to a death that was otherwise escapable. If Christ had just lived a perfect life and then died a natural death, he would not have been voluntarily giving up his life, laying down his life, pouring out his blood, choosing in obedience to be a purifying sacrifice for mankind. Nor would it have clearly and dramatically and openly and publicly manifested God's holiness and the repudiation and condemnation of sin.

In Christ—THE man, the perfect sacrifice, the complete example, the central reality of the whole divine purpose—the body of sin had to be put to death, *really and truly and literally and actually*, as it was typically and figuratively in the Mosaic shadows. It had to be lifted up before all the world in condemnation and repudiation.

The crucifixion of Christ is the most public event of all time. All mankind's history is dated from Christ—forward and backward—AD and BC. This present entire heathen, pagan world in international dealings dates every act according to his birth. Diverse as they are, it is their common point of reference. This is no coincidence, no mistake, no accident or oversight. It is a providential, condemning witness. From God's point of view, Christ's life and death form the pivot of all human history; all radiates from it, all revolves around it.

Sin, the Devil, the Diabolos—in the Romans, in the Jews, in the world of mankind—openly rejected him, openly rejected the perfect Son of God who had never done anything but good, and put him to a cruel death, cut him off violently from the land of the living. The Seed of the Serpent and the Seed of the Woman—the eternal enmity—begun in Eden, brought to a

climax at Calvary, finally resolved when the last enemy, death, is destroyed, and God is all in all.

Christ, in his death, did not appease or satisfy or put away God's anger. Rather he manifested God's love and holiness and goodness. God's anger against sin is never appeased. He will be angry with sin till sin is eliminated from the earth. But anger is more properly applied to responsible living creatures, not inanimate principles. God's anger at sinners is appeased when they repent and change and put away and repudiate their sins, and wholeheartedly serve Him.

Christ's sacrifice was not to appease God's anger. The whole conception was all of God's Own love and wisdom and initiative, for man's reconciliation—

> *"God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them... We beseech you, be reconciled to God . . . He* (God) *made him* (Jesus) *to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."* (2 Cor. 5:19-21).

There is nothing here about anger being appeased, but rather God and Christ working together in love to manifest Truth, and to open a way of holiness for man to escape death and achieve the divine nature. THEN, with the flesh of sin condemned, and holiness upheld and vindicated, mercy could be soundly extended without violating righteousness—as long as the perfect Christ-foundation is always kept prominently in view and recognition as the only doorway to life. Therefore, we always pray, always approach God, always seek His attention and help and communion *"in Jesus' Name."*

Mosaic sacrifice has long since passed away in actual use, but its lessons and instructions are just as current as ever as to what God requires of those who seek Him.

The ordinances of sacrifice in general, and Christ's supreme sacrifice in particular—the one great reality which fulfilled all the shadows—were *representative*, NOT substitutionary. This is an essential and fundamental distinction. The substitution idea leads to all sorts of error. The representative principle guides us both in true understanding and true action. Christ's sacrificial death was not as a substitute, *instead* of us: it was as a representative, *on behalf of us*. He was one of us. He stood for all mankind. Only as part of him can we approach unto God. All are wrapped up and included in him—

"If one died for (on behalf of) *all, then were all dead"* (2 Cor. 4:14).

This reasoning does not follow if "for" is taken as "instead of." As a representative, as *one of us,* a strong one of the sin-stricken race, his death was beautiful and fitting, and a manifestation of God's holiness, and an opening up of a way out of death through travail unto joy, for himself and for us in him.

As one of us, our representative, he opened up the way of life. And we can follow him in that way to eternal life only by dying completely to ourselves and becoming a *part of him,* completely enclosed *in* him and covered *by* him. As a representative, a strong loving Elder Brother to lead the way and carry the weak, he manifested God's love and provision for man.

"BY HIS OWN BLOOD he entered in once into the Holy Place, having obtained eternal redemption" (Heb. 9:12).

"God brought Jesus again from the dead THROUGH THE BLOOD OF THE EVERLASTING COVENANT" (Heb. 13:20).

Viewed as a substitute, dying *instead* of us, bearing God's wrath, the innocent punished for the guilty, there is no beauty, no justice, no glorifying of God, no manifestation of God's righteousness. God did not in anger punish Christ for our sins. Rather in love He *forgave* our sins for Christ's sake—

"Whom God hath set forth to be a (hilasterion: a 'mercyseat,' a place of extending mercy) *through faith in his blood, for the remission* (forgiveness) *of sins that are past, that He* (God) *might be just, and the Justifier of him that hath faith in Jesus"* (Rom. 3:25-26).

Christ is the golden mercyseat, the coverlid of the Ark, the Cherubim-throne of the glory of God. The Mosaic mercyseat was purified unto God's service by the sprinkled sacrificial blood—*"by his own blood* he entered . . ." Viewed as a substitute, the Mosaic sacrifices and the great fulfilling, culminating sacrifice of Christ teach us nothing as to the way we must walk. They just take the responsibility off us and put it on someone else. Substitution is a heathen conception of sacrifice, not a scriptural one.

Perceived as representatives of us, Christ's sacrifice and the Mosaic sacrifices in all their host of detail and regulation teach us a great treasure of guidance and instruction, of solemn responsibility and joyful duty.

"By him therefore let us offer the sacrifices of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving

thanks to His Name . . . To DO GOOD and to COMMUNICATE (*koinonia:* share, distribute) *forget not, for with SUCH SACRIFICES God is well pleased"* (Heb. 13:15-16).

The Mosaic sacrifices beautifully manifest and teach seven basic principles of approach to God:—

1. REPENTANCE, CLEANSING, PURIFICATION. We are unclean from birth by reason of the law of sin in our members, and additionally by our allowing it to move us to sinful action, to rule over us. This is especially illustrated by the purifying Sin and Trespass Offerings.

2. ADORATION, HOMAGE, WORSHIP, SUBMISSION. Humble and abased recognition of the greatness and majesty of God.

3. CONSECRATION, HOLINESS, DEDICATION, DEVOTION. The complete, unreserved giving over of the whole life to God. This is seen especially in the solemn Whole Burnt Offering.

4. THANKSGIVING, GRATITUDE. Recognition of goodness and blessing *from* God. This is shown in the Drink Offering of wine.

5. SUPPLICATION, ENTREATY, DEPENDENCE, NEED. Seen especially in the sweet Incense of prayer.

6. OBLIGATION, RESPONSIBILITY, DUTY, LABOR, SERVICE. Seen particularly in the Meat (more correctly, Meal) Offering—the fruit of the ground and of man's daily toil.

7. COVENANT-RELATIONSHIP, FELLOWSHIP, COMMUNION. Entrance into the divine family—especially manifested in the joyful Peace Offering, the only one of which the offerer himself partook.

A primary requirement of the sacrifices is that the offerer must bring them "with his own hands." There could be no substitutes. The rich could not pay to have someone do it for them. An earnest friend or parent could not do it for one who was lax. Each must do it himself in person. All stood equally before God, and each must do his required part. The clear lesson for us today is that no one is exempt from the work of the Lord. We *dare* not leave it to others, no matter how much better qualified they seem to be. Truly the work may take many different forms according to ability and circumstances—sweeping the hall is as important as lecturing to many 1,000s *if that is our best*—but all are required to give their best and most, and to do everything they do "as unto the Lord."

We should never, in any aspect of life, do anything that cannot be done as unto God. This eliminates all useless,

unworthy activity, and gives meaning and purpose and holiness and sanctification to life's every necessary task, however humble or ordinary it may be. And it also emphasizes the responsibility to do *everything* we do to the very best of our power and ability—not because the thing itself is necessarily important, but because the way we do anything is important to our character. We must live wholly *in God:* all must be done as unto God: and God requires the very best.

This is another general aspect of the sacrifices: they had to be the very best a man had. They had to be perfect and without blemish. This was not only to teach that the One Great Offering for sin must be perfectly sinless and spotless, and that man can never therefore earn his own salvation from sin and death—but it was also to teach the parallel and balancing lesson that *our* offering to God must be the very best *we* have, even though we admittedly fall far short of perfection at best. Giving less than our all is presuming on God's mercy, and dishonoring His love and goodness that He has poured out so abundantly upon us.

For anyone not to desire with intense longing to give everything they can to God, and do everything they can for Him, reveals a fatal lack of devotion, and gratitude, *and understanding.* God can and will graciously accept our puny little "best" as perfection— as purified by the blood of Christ, but how can He possibly impute perfection to us if we do not care enough to do our best to strive toward perfection? This makes a mockery of the whole process, like forcing a noble scholarship on an indolent scholar. If our hearts and minds and efforts are on other things, how can we expect God to pursue us and force perfection upon us?

The first requisite of approach to God is a willingness—yea, more than a willingness, rather an anxious eagerness—to do everything He requires, and to get rid of everything that stands in the way—a true, mature recognition of the respective values and importances of the very brief present and the eternal future. Any reservation or reluctance to submit to any requirement of God makes us useless to Him, for the heart is not right—and *a right heart is vital.*

* * *

THE BURNT OFFERING. This was completely consumed upon the altar—except the skin which went to the priest. This point is interesting, because the skin is the covering, the cloak of righteousness. In symbolism of the slain lamb, God covered

the sin and nakedness of Adam and Eve with coats of skins. Their *own* skin was not an acceptable covering: rather *it* exposed and emphasized their shameful nakedness.

The Burnt Offering is the basic sacrifice. The two lambs every day, and all the principle sacrifices every week, every month, on all the feast days, and on all special and solemn occasions—were all whole Burnt Offerings. This offering symbolized the complete dedication and devotion of the life to God that is essential to gain His favor. This is perhaps the biggest and most vital lesson of the entire sacrificial picture. Until and unless we realize that the essence of our covenant with God is that we give our whole lives to His service, we have no hope of life. For the dedication of this very brief life of probation, He has promised an eternity of purest, highest joy.

At the very best and most that we can do, the requirements and the reward are infinitely out of proportion—we can give nothing remotely comparable to what we receive. But God does require (and what could be more reasonable) as an evidence of our love, *all* that we have: *all* our heart and strength and life and mind. The Whole Burnt Offering, completely consumed on the altar and arising as a sweet-smelling savor to God, teaches us that to attain to the glories of eternity we must constantly labor to bring all our time and energies into the service of God. The sacrifices were typical. They were shadows. They were pictorial representations of what must happen *in reality in us*, if we are to be acceptable to God.

> *"Ye also as living stones are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices"* (1 Pet. 2:5).

Therefore, this Whole Burnt Offering must have its counterpart in us. It is just as if God said directly to us, *"This* is what I require *of you."* Indeed, He does through Paul say so—

> *"Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service"* (Rom. 12:1).

And it *is* a reasonable service. In view of the infinite magnitude and glory of what God promises, anything less would *not* be reasonable. Anything less than a living sacrifice, a Whole Burnt Offering, would be an insult to God. And we must not only give ourselves wholly to God. Even that is not enough. We must do it *eagerly*, with the oil of joy without which no sacrifice was acceptable (except in some cases where the specific omission of the oil had a particular significance). We must

truly see and realize the necessity and the beauty and fittingness and desirability of so doing. It must be a deep and true and satisfying pleasure. We must develop a spiritual state of mind wherein we are not able to be happy doing anything less.

Out of the travail of all our problems there must be born in each of us something very wonderful and very unworldly; something very personal and individual; something very beautiful and spiritual. If this occurs, all the travail is worthwhile. We must perceive in *all* that happens a divine, loving means working out a glorious end. Very little in this life will be as we desire it to be. But we have the all-sufficient assurance that all will be exactly as *God* desires it to be.

* * *

Let us never think of sacrifice in the common, debased sense of the term as men use it—as a loss, a deprivation, a giving up of something. The word doesn't mean that. Men in their ignorance and self-commendation have added that. Sacrifice is a humble, joyful, eager yielding of the self to God in love and thanksgiving, without any assumption of self-glory for some supposed noble self-deprivation. Literally, the word in English simply means "holy act, deed or work of holiness." The original Bible words for sacrifice just mean "gift, offering, drawing near, devotion, dedication."

We have nothing to "sacrifice." All is God's to begin with. We can never give God anything but our love and our intelligent worshipful realization of the goodness and beauty of all His ways. The joy and satisfaction of love is in giving. Giving is the essence of love. If giving is not its heart and joy, then it is not love, but lust. Love gives, lust wants. The world cannot see the difference.

God is love. He wants to give. It is His essence. He wants to pour out showers of blessing and goodness upon us, but He can do it only where there is an intelligent appreciation of the true facts of life that He has revealed, and a deep and unshakable commitment in the heart to live in harmony with them. Where there is ignorance of the true realities of life, as in the natural mind of the flesh, or where there is unwillingness to conform the life to the things of God, where lust and greed and pride and pleasure are allowed to pull in the other direction, then God cannot bless.

* * *

THE PEACE OFFERING. This was voluntary. It was never commanded specifically, except on the occasion of Pentecost.

And this exception is fitting, for the Pentecost symbolizes the Firstfruits of Christ's coming: the marriage supper of the Lamb—the great consummation of the communion of God with His people taken out of all the previous ages of the world.

In the Peace Offering the offerer himself partook. The Peace Offering was the culminating offering, the joyous offering, the partaking of holy food belonging to God, in His house, as His guest and companion. In this offering, God and the priest and the worshipper all shared. There was a portion for each. Here is the perfect union and fellowship of the believer with God through Christ: the covenant meal of friendship and loving intimacy, foreshadowing the great fruition and fulfilment of the eternal divine plan.

But though this was a voluntary offering of the offerer's spontaneous freewill and thanksgiving, still there were many specific details of procedure that *had to be followed exactly* for the offering to be a blessing and not an abomination. Here is vividly emphasized the lesson that we must be taught of God in everything. Of ourselves we know nothing of eternal truth, and we can do nothing right, even our thanksgiving, without divine instruction.

This offering must be completely eaten the same day it was offered (or, in some cases, by the following day). If any part was left any longer, it was an abomination. There are several lessons here. First, the general one of obedience: It must be God's way, even though the offering was voluntary. Then hoarding was discouraged. This is the lesson of the manna. The blessings of God must, in faith, be put to current use in His service. Hoarding is faithlessness and idolatry. Then the related virtue of generosity. To get it all eaten, the offerer was expected to share the feast with others, with the poor, especially the poor among the Levites who were devoted to the service of God and dependent on the offerings of the faithful Israelites for their sustenance.

There is another regulation concerning the Peace Offering that is solemnly thought-provoking. Though it was a joyful and freewill offering to God, yet if any ate of it while unclean by reason of contact with death or unclean objects, *he was to be put to death.* God is a consuming fire to the careless and unheeding. By being given to God, this food became holy, bringing great responsibility to any who partook of it. The eater must be made and kept clean in the God-appointed way, or he would be cut off from life.

What a sobering consideration!—right in the midst of the most joyous and God-directed activity. Israel was called to holiness. They were to be a pure nation of priests to dwell in the presence of God. Tremendous blessings were theirs if faithful, but also tremendous responsibilities. Even in this joyful Peace Offering, there could be no carelessness or thoughtlessness or forgetting of the duties of the divine relationship; no heedless or casual contact or association with the unclean. We are told that all this was for lessons and warnings to us—

"Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that blood" (1 Cor. 11:28).

In the memorial feast, we fellowship at God's table, as did the partaker of the Peace Offering. This bread and wine mean joyful eternal life, *if* we partake worthily, *if* we realize and live up to our great responsibilities; *if* we are faithful and sincere in our solemn covenant of the complete dedication of our lives to the work and service of God—to separation from the world and all its uncleanness.

* * *

THE SIN OFFERING and the TRESPASS OFFERING dealt with different aspects of sin. The regulations are quite different. The animal for the Sin Offering varied according to whether the sin was by the Congregation, a Priest, a Ruler, or one of the people: for the Trespass Offering it did not vary. The Sin Offering did not require restitution; the Trespass Offering did. The Sin Offering seemed to deal more broadly and generally and fundamentally with sin: this was the offering for sin in the national festivals. The Trespass Offering was more specifically for individuals.

In connection with both, sins of ignorance are referred to, and must be atoned for by sacrifice. This is an interesting consideration. If we look back twenty, or ten, or even five years, we shall realize—*if* we have grown in our knowledge of God—that much of what we did at that time was tainted with the sin of ignorance. We see now where we were then limited in our spirit and attitude and understanding.

And we can be quite sure, though we cannot see it now, that if we continue to study and meditate upon the Word of God, in another five or ten years (if we are still in this present probation) we shall be able to look back and discern many of our *present* limitations and shortcomings that we are blind to today. And so it continues throughout our life. We live under

the constant shadow of sins of ignorance, and we must constantly pray for God's mercy on them.

There must be a constant growth of knowledge and understanding in the ways of God and the spirit of Christ. For each added day of life and opportunity that is given us, more will be expected of us in character and labor and understanding. Woe betide that slothful servant who has not been using all his time in labor and preparation for his Lord!

* * *

We must overcome—not to absolute perfection, because that for us is impossible—but to perfection within the framework of the definition of Scripture, and the merciful appointments of God. Perfection is required by God. In His holiness He can tolerate no less. And in His love He has provided for it—by our constant effort *toward* perfection, *and* by the constant washing and repurifying in the blood of Christ. Every sin must be washed away in that blood. Every sin must be repented of and repudiated. We must stand pure before God to be accepted.

We are so constituted in weakness that we do not and cannot even know all our sins. Every thought out of harmony with the perfection of God and with absolute truth is sin. In the imperfection of our mind and knowledge and weakness of the flesh, we cannot help but constantly sin—constantly fall short of perfection. But He has graciously provided for this too—

> *"The Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought . . ."*

—we do not know, we *cannot* know, to perfection what we should pray for—what sins of weakness and ignorance and incompleteness and partial comprehension we should pray to be forgiven for and cleansed from. We are slowly learning, slowly advancing toward the goal of perfect understanding—

> *". . . we know not what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered, and He that searcheth the heart knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit."*

For deliberate sin, there was and is no forgiveness. But some sins which *we* would consider deliberate *were* forgiven—so we cannot judge others. The sabbath day gatherer of sticks was put to death; David's murder and adultery were forgiven. Only God knows where to draw the line as to what is deliberate rebellion, and what is weakness for this poor erring flesh. For *ourselves*, we must always bear in mind the danger,

remembering with trembling that God will not be mocked. He will not for a moment tolerate rebellion. Whenever we do anything we *know* is wrong, however small it may be, we are treading on the loose gravel of the edge of the precipice of no return—

"God is not mocked" . . ."God hath no pleasure in fools"

For *others*, we must always be prepared to forgive and receive, and leave the final judgment to God Who knows each heart.

* * *

THE MEAL OFFERING, always of wheat, was a thankful recognition of the care of God in the daily bread, and a presenting to God of the fruit of daily toil.

THE DRINK OFFERING of wine was an outpouring of spiritual rejoicing and zealous gladness and thankfulness of heart, essential to make the other offerings acceptable to God.

And three things must accompany the sacrifices: the SALT of purity and uncorruptness—

"Ye are the salt of the earth."

The OIL of knowledge and enlightenment in the Spirit—

"Ye are the light of the world."

And the sweet INCENSE of faithful prayer—

"Pray without ceasing: in everything give thanks."

* * *

THE PASSOVER was a special sacrifice, a sacrifice of special deliverance. Its ordinances were unique, but it most closely resembled the Peace Offering. All of it except the blood and fat was eaten by the offerers themselves. Unlike the Peace Offering, none was given to the priests, for when it was first instituted there was no separate priestly class. It portrays Israel in its highest relationship to God as a holy people, a nation of priests.

The Passover lamb was given special attention and care. It was roasted whole, and no bones were broken—especially pointing to Christ's offering. Bitter herbs were to be eaten with it, representing salvation through sorrow and suffering.

It was to be partaken of in active readiness for a journey—with feet shod, loins girded, and staff in hand. Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us, and we too must keep the feast in a state of readiness for the journey, wherever it may lead—recognizing that we have here no continuing city. Nothing of the present is permanent or important. We must keep

ourselves lightly loaded and travel-girded, careful not to build ties and possessions in this present evil world.

The Passover must be accompanied, Paul says (1 Cor. 5:8), by—

"The unleavened bread of SINCERITY and TRUTH."

Sincerity and Truth are powerful and beautiful words: powerful and beautiful qualities. *Sincerity* is purity from any pretense or hypocrisy or deception. *Truth* is freedom from any error or falsehood or mistake. These are divine qualities, not common to mankind. Very few will hold firmly and faithfully to sincerity and truth when a small degree of concealment or misrepresentation will save them loss, or get them gain. But such are no use to a holy God—

"Thou desirest Truth in the inward parts" (Psa. 51:6).

Only those who in spiritual wisdom perceive the living beauty—and dedicate their lives to the principles—of Sincerity and Truth are acceptable into God's family. By nature, we are all creatures of error and subterfuge and deception. Lying and evasion for self-protection comes naturally right from childhood. Sincerity must be learned. We must be shown and perceive the beauty of the better, more excellent way. Pure, guileless sincerity is essential to holiness.

We must not look upon sacrifice as a "giving up" of something. It is a gaining and receiving; a joy and a privilege. It is the highest and most satisfying *use* to which we may put anything we have, including our own selves and our lives. To a mature mind, there should be no particular pleasure in just possessing something. It is exceedingly juvenile to get pleasure merely in possession—it is a shallow, silly, selfish, unhealthy pleasure, not worthy of the name of pleasure. The pleasure and satisfaction should come in the *use* to which anything is put, in the *good* that can be accomplished by means of it.

And the greatest mature satisfaction comes from putting all we have to the highest and best use. THIS IS SACRIFICE.

Christ, in perfect wisdom, put his whole life to the best possible use: he accomplished with it the utmost possible good. He reversed the whole trend of history from failure to success. He turned death into eternal life, and sorrow into eternal joy, for all who have the wisdom to lay hold upon what he accomplished for them.

Do we detract from the preciousness and nobility of the sacrifice of Christ by saying that sacrifice is not sacrifice in the

common, worldly, self-commending use of the term? Do we rob him of the recognition that he gave up everything, and suffered everything, for his brethren?

By no means. He did not give up anything *worthwhile;* rather he achieved and gained everything worthwhile. There was no self-pity, no self-glory, no self-delusion, in his sacrifice—his pure offering, his drawing near, his gift to God, his "deed of holiness." Christ did not look upon himself as a martyr, but as the most highly privileged, the most really blessed, the most deeply honored of all mankind.

It was his infinite blessing and riches to be the perfect manifestation of the love and beauty of God, the perfect manifestation of God Himself, to be ever in perfect communion with God—

"I AND MY FATHER ARE ONE" (Jn. 10:30).

He was a man of sorrows; but he was also a man of transcendant joy. He spoke of that glorious, unquenchable inner joy on the very eve of the terrible ordeal of the crucifixion—

"These things have I spoken that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full" (Jn. 15:11).

We read on two occasions that Jesus wept. There must have been many, many, occasions that he wept. His life was a life of weeping—*but not for himself.* On him was laid the burden of the sorrows of all the world, and it was his glorious, suffering joy to take them all upon him, and to bear them all away.

Love not only gives. It takes. It gives of goodness, and comfort, and strength, and courage. It takes of sorrow, and fellow-feeling, and shared bitterness in the fellowship of suffering. If it does not do both—if it shrinks from either task—it is not love.

We may bring ourselves to the giving part, and triumph gloriously in it, and we think our love is complete. But if we shrink or run away from the taking part, it really is not love. We have not yet attained.

"Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us . . ."
"He is the mercy-seat for our sins . . ."
"This cup is the New Covenant in my blood . . ."
"If we walk in the Light—IF WE WALK IN THE LIGHT—the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from ALL sin."

The Fruit of the Spirit

"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law" (Gal. 5:22).

Joy and Peace follow Love here, even as they always do. Without Love, joy is fleeting and peace precarious. Any "joy" that is not the result of true spiritual Love is at best a vain and transitory pleasure. Temporary joy, the effect of some present occurrence or circumstance of this present life is of no value, for soon it is over and its impression, if any, is negative upon our permanent peace of mind. It leaves a void, a longing, an empty, sad retrospect.

Conversely, the Joy that is a state of mind resulting from true divine Love fully pursued, and the knowledge of effectual service lovingly performed, is ever fruitful, for it can be enjoyed whenever a few quiet moments afford opportunity for meditation. Time does not dim it but rather enhances it, because it is related to glorious futurity and eternity.

And Peace, too, that is not the fruit of Love, is valueless and vain. The Peace we are taught to seek, disregarding and even avoiding any other, is that which follows the unvarying service of God—the peaceful and comforting assurance that there is, if we are faithful—

"Laid up for us a crown of life."

Present peace we are not to hope for. It is insidiously disarming, and weakens our hope and prayer for Christ's early return. There is an ever-present danger in snug security, and present satisfaction and gratification, for it robs the glorious promised Peace of that attraction which should spur us on along the weary path to the goal of eventual perfection.

Future Peace must be our goal, as must also be future Joy. For the Joy that was set before him, Christ endured all things, and unless we in our lesser degree do the same, we shall be cast aside and forgotten in that day when "peace on earth" is at last an accomplished fact.

There is but one way to assure for ourselves that strengthening peace of mind which elevates our vision above this life's temporary ills—the Peace that Paul must have known when he said—

"I have fought a good fight, I have kept the faith."

"Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness."

What a wonderful way to end this life! All his sufferings and sacrifices and losses and disappointments were now seen in their true and beautiful light as jewels in his crown. This crown of life, we are told by James, the Lord has promised to them that love him.

* * *

The next spiritual fruit is Longsuffering and this, too, we see is but a temporary product of love, for Paul tells us that—

"Love suffereth long and is kind."

It is temporary in the sense that the time will at last come when longsuffering will not be needed.

The succeeding two fruits, Gentleness and Goodness, are also dependent upon Love for their performance—

"Love vaunteth not itself; thinketh no evil."

Following these is Faith. In this same chapter we read—

"Faith worketh by Love."

Without Love Faith is dead, as are all virtues in Love's absence. John tells us in his second epistle (v. 6)—

"This is Love, that we walk after His commandments."

That is, Love is working and doing; and James completes the argument with the warning that—

"Faith without works is dead, but by works is Faith made perfect."

Paul closes his beautiful eulogy of Love with this—

"And now abideth Faith, Hope, and Love, these three, but the greatest of these is Love."

This verse is a summary of the whole chapter. The theme is that Love is paramount. On the one hand we read—

"If I have not Love, I am nothing."

And on the other—

"Everyone that loveth is born of God."

Hebrews 11 records the great deeds wrought through Faith, and it was for the Hope of Israel that Paul stood in chains before Agrippa, but he values Love above both Faith and Hope.

Faith requires a promise, some anticipated good, some future benefit. When this is fulfilled, Faith ends in sight and so is lost.

Hope, too, infers future realization—a goal which, when reached, converts Hope into accomplishment so Hope ceases.

But Love gives all and asks nothing. Love seeks not her own, endures all things, and faileth never. As long as life is present, it cannot perish. It is the foundation and keystone of the Scriptures.

The writings of John are an unequaled epitome of divine expression on this subject. He tells us that God is Love, that He dwells in Love, and that Love is of God.

All the inspired writings testify to this. Even as God in all His works was motivated by Love, so do we find it the keynote of His messages to man.

It is, perhaps, difficult to realize and appreciate, to the extent which we should, the great Love that God has demonstrated. We may not easily regard our all-powerful Author from this point of view. We see Him as great Jehovah—omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent—creating and sustaining all.

But let us dwell on the marvelous extent of the affection He bears His children. Through His Love, in the beginning, He made man in His own glorious likeness, placed him in pleasant and beautiful surroundings, gave him dominion over the whole earth and provided him with all he could reasonably desire, and more than he proved himself worthy of, for it was not long before he manifested both disobedience and ingratitude.

He fell, but in administering the forewarned punishment, God's Love was again evidenced by tempering the sentence of death with a ray of hope and the assurance of the ultimate extinction of sin.

But man fell again, and so the history follows. God, with Love and patience inconceivable, repeatedly returned to him as repentance was manifested, and led him anew to the way which, if faithfully pursued, would bring him life.

This Divine affection led Noah into the Ark, and called forth Abraham to become a great nation. It guided this same nation, rarely appreciative or obedient, into the promised land, and watched over them there. They were assured of His protection and Love, but it did not inspire them to obedience.

"Because God loved you,"

—Moses was told to tell them—

"He hath brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of bondmen."

But even before they had reached the land, and while miraculously sustained by food from above, they murmured against their divine Deliverer.

We cannot but marvel at the infinite patience that the Lord revealed—humoring them, comforting them, and ever protecting them, when in a moment, He could have destroyed them all, but did not for the Love He bore their fathers.

And, continuing on, His Love completely pervades their subsequent history throughout the Old Testament, in which, too, is apparent a continuous and beautiful foreshadowing of the greatest manifestation of that all-embracing Love, the fulfilment of which is reserved for the New—

"God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son."

This is from the writings of the beloved John who also says:

"Herein is love, that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 Jn. 4:10).

Although it assumes such magnificent proportions, it is far from a blind, misdirected indulgence as is often the unfortunate case with earthy parents. It is Love administered with an incomprehensible intelligence, chastening when necessary, rebuking when necessary, but always for our ultimate benefit.

It is ever-vigilant, guarding, and guiding, but it does not rob the recipient of character. It is true that God is our Refuge and our Strength, but we must remember that—

"Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth."

And it is—

"By much tribulation that we must enter the Kingdom."

* * *

No less remarkable is the Love that controlled every act of our great High Priest, His perfect Son, who—at the end of a life spent in untiring and unselfish service for his brethren—submitted to crucifixion that these brethren whom he loved might have life and have it more abundantly. Here, too, we find the words of John the deepest and most expressive—

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

"Hereby perceive we love, because he laid down his life for us."

Whenever we consider the extremes to which the faithful followers of Christ were led by their love for him and the Father, we are invariably pursued by uneasiness and misgivings as we compare our meager services with theirs. Christ's requirements of his followers are clearly given in Luke 14:26:

"If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple."

"And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple."

This they gladly and unhesitatingly did, and we find them saying in childlike faith, as he showed them the Father's purpose—

"Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee."

Are we not disquieted by the unfavorable comparison of our sacrifices with theirs? They made God's service the only interest in their lives. They gave up *everything* for it. For it they were reviled, despised, persecuted, scourged, imprisoned, stoned, and often put to death.

What do we do to compare with this, with our many pleasures, peaceful lives, and unmolested worship?

Consider especially the sufferings of Paul. We are all familiar with them as they are enumerated in 2nd Corinthians 11:23-27—

"Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft."

"Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one; thrice was I beaten with rods; once was I stoned; thrice I suffered shipwreck; a night and day I have been in the deep."

"In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren."

"In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness."

For the Truth's sake, and in the service of God, have any of us ever even *once* had an experience like this? But Paul's weary existence was FULL of such. And he says—

"I have suffered the loss of all things and do count them but dung that I may win Christ" (Phil. 3:8).

Looking back twenty centuries to the far distant scenes of Biblical history, is it not much too easy to regard the things said, done, and endured in an illusionary and unreal light? We read of them persecuted and pursued from city to city, but always preaching, without fully realizing the magnitude of their distress.

But if we picture them as men whose love of life and pleasure was just as strong as is ours; and to whom hardships, sacrifices, losses, pain, and weariness were just as difficult to bear as they are for us; men who enjoyed reviling, scorn, and

contempt to no greater degree than do we; and to whom the world was just as hard and real as it is to us—then the full measure of their love is clear.

It may be argued that these early brethren received greater strength, greater signs, greater guidance and greater revelation than we—but were they really so much more highly favored?

Which is more comforting—to see Christ disappear in the clouds, and look forward to a persecuted existence of painful waiting, or to have irrefutable assurance that his return is imminent, and our redemption draweth nigh?

Which is more encouraging—to see the Jews scattered and dispersed in God's wrath, or to see them regathered by His guiding love?

Which is more strengthening—to have God's purpose foretold or to see it fulfilled and almost completely consummated?

True, theirs was the comfort of the presence and companionship of Christ, but if our faith is as it should be, his spiritual presence should be as comforting to us; and remember, too, they carried on after he had left them, and were faithful unto death. John confidently wrote—

> *"There is no fear in love, for perfect love casteth out fear."*

Ample proof this is, to be sure, of the vital importance that the disciples attached to the possession of this quality, but it is not necessary to resort to inference to draw such conclusions, for divine command is stronger on no other subject.

That we must evidence and exercise Love constantly and continuously is the theme of countless exhortations in the New Testament.

Consider the reply of Christ, when asked which was the greatest commandment. He told his interrogator, a querulous Pharisee, to love the Lord with all his heart, soul and mind, and his neighbor as himself, for on those two commandments the whole Law rested.

"Love," said Paul, is the one word that fulfills all the law.

Quotations such as these are innumerable and how could it be otherwise when love was the very heart and foundation of the Gospel they preached? Do we wonder why John was particularly cited as the disciple whom Jesus loved? We need not if we consider his character.

No other gospel than his evinces such a deep and loving understanding of the Master, no other epistles are so replete with exhortations and commendation of love, and no other

disciple was more wholly animated by the fervor of his affection for the Lord.

What better example could be cited of the fulfilment of Christ's assurance that—

"He that loveth Me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him and will manifest myself to him."

It was to John, we remember, that Christ made his last, most wonderful manifestation—the visions of the Revelation.

Thus is love established as the primary and paramount virtue, the most nourishing and upbuilding of the fruit of the Spirit.

Though none would doubt, in the face of the foregoing evidence, love's essentiality, there may be diversity as to its interpretation. In fact, the general conception is far from that love idealized by the Scriptures.

There are many that think that love is completely fulfilled if a benevolent and kindly but passive attitude is maintained before all, and who consider their duty to God amply discharged if they worship Him and ascribe to Him all wisdom and power.

True, these are inseparable from love, but this is not what love fundamentally means.

Love is not merely worship, adoration, and awe. It is not that passive quality it is all too often represented as. It involves and necessitates unquestioning obedience, unselfish sacrifice, unswerving devotion, and untiring service—

"This is love, that we walk after His commandments."

The love God requires is pre-eminently *service*—

"By love SERVE one another"

—we read, and this is the true meaning of—

"Love thy neighbor as thyself."

John pleads (1 Jn. 3:18)—

"Let us not love in word, but in deed and truth."

If God merely looked upon us with tender and affectionate regard, and took no further care for us, our plight would indeed be a sorry one. But God, to whom the nations are as a drop in the bucket, has highly favored and shown us the way of life, and watches over our welfare every moment.

When we think of the millions who live and die in ignorance of these things, we realize how greatly blessed we are. Ours is a very responsible position, for each of us has been chosen from thousands to receive this revelation from God.

And it is a saddening and sobering thought that the handful who are called are "many" when compared to the few who are finally chosen. But John assures us that we may have boldness in the day of judgment if our love is made perfect.

If Christ had been content to preach charity and goodwill, and had not the love which led him to lay down his life for his brethren, our hope would at best be meager and dim. But Christ's interpretation of love conformed perfectly with God's—lifetime, selfless service.

It may appear absurd to say that all that is required to be recipients of God's promised glory is love, but not when it is realized what that love entails. It must be of the same purity and exalted holiness as that which the Father Himself has evidenced.

Such Love is not a natural human attribute. It plays no part in the mind of the flesh. It must be the result of a victory of the spiritual over the carnal.

Love bestowed upon one who returns it brings no credit or reward to the donor, for, Christ tells us, even sinners do that. But, he continues, "Love your enemies," by which he means—

"Do good to them that hate you"

—not just think or wish good. This to all men, and much more so to the Brotherhood.

As incidents arise to test our character and fitness as vessels for God's glory, the human and natural impulse which immediately presents itself knows nothing of love, but would seek instant vindication and redress.

This must be overcome, even as must be the invariable tendency to interpret doubtful actions in a bad light, for—even assuming that this interpretation be the correct one (as it rarely is)—still our course is clear, and love practiced at such a time affords the only reliable proof that our battle with the flesh is a winning one—

"Love covereth a multitude of sins."

The whole scriptural theme is summarized in Paul's words—

"By love serve one another"

—continuously and without respect of persons or thought of thanks or appreciation, remembering that if we love one another, GOD DWELLETH IN US; and that service to the least of these is service to the Lord.

It will not always bring joy as the world conceives joy; it will not always be productive of peace as it is now known, but if this course is truly and faithfully pursued, the quiet, comforting

joy of a loving and malice-free heart, and the tranquil, confident peace of a conscience pure before God, will be ours in this present time, and in the world to come, life everlasting.

Finally, let us remember Paul's admonition to be rooted and grounded in love, that Christ's parting words to his faithful followers may be fulfilled in us—

"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."

Let a Man Examine HIMSELF

"Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin . . . He CANNOT sin, because he is born of God" (1 Jn. 3:9).

The most pressing and urgent lifelong consideration of any who aspire to the Kingdom of God must be their own complete personal transformation of character. The realization of this urgent necessity is far too dim among us. This is our foremost ecclesial concern, and the root of most ecclesial problems.

Any attempt to judge, criticize or regulate the lives and conduct of OTHERS—until we have brought OURSELVES into line with the commands of God in this respect—is hypocrisy.

We tend to feel, or at least to act as though we feel, that if we can legislate righteousness upon others, and surround ourselves with the external appearance of a sound ecclesial framework, then our own personal shortcomings will somehow be absorbed, and overlooked, and compensated for, in the general ecclesial strength. We tend very much to get our priorities in this respect completely reversed. Jesus said (Matt. 7:5)—

> *"Thou hypocrite: first cast out the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast the mote out of thy brother's eye."*

We shall find that the more attention and concern we give to our own very numerous shortcomings, the less will be the vehemence of our zeal to condemn our brethren, and the more cautiously, and gently, and Christlike shall we approach that task.

Let us, then, frankly examine our own conduct and characters in the light of the plain, simple commands of Scripture, and see if we are in any position to presume to operate on the eyes of others.

Let us judge, and suspect, and expose OURSELVES at least as critically as we so eagerly judge and suspect and expose others. Rather, indeed, let us judge ourselves far more searchingly than we judge others, for this is the prescribed course of Scripture, of wisdom, and of love. The divine command is—

> *"Let a man examine . . . HIMSELF."*

And not for just the solemn and dramatic half minute or so of the so-reverent silence that ritually precedes the distribution of the emblems on Sunday morning, but ALL the time, all day, every day. Before doing or saying anything, ever, let us ask ourselves—

"What is the scriptural, Christlike, God-pleasing thing to do or say in this circumstance and at this moment?"

This of course will severely slow us up naturally, as far as getting anything done, but it will tremendously speed us up spiritually, and that is where the progress is so desperately needed.

And of every act or statement, let us ask ourselves searchingly—

"Was that the natural, unthinking reaction of sinful flesh, like all the actions of the animal world, or was it deliberately and consciously motivated by love and faith and submissive obedience to flesh-crucifying divine command?"

Impractical? Too much trouble? Too big a burden in a busy, active, "successful," acquisitive life? Perhaps eternal life with Christ is just a bit too much trouble for us: not quite worth the wholly dedicated lifelong effort required—the constant battle against the natural flesh. Well, that is for each of us to decide, but let us at least be fair enough to ourselves to face it openly and make the decision one way or the other.

* * *

We are all familiar with the 13th chapter of 1st Corinthians—universally admitted to be a very beautiful, emotion-stirring chapter, like beautiful music. But let us put emotion aside and examine it logically and practically. Let us see just what it says, and let us frankly face just how we measure up to it. Paul describes all the beautiful, unfleshly characteristics of spiritual love—

Longsuffering	*Freedom from anger*
Patience	*Freedom from suspicion of others*
Kindness	*Freedom from envy or selfish desire*
Self-abasement	*Consistent joyfulness*
Selflessness	*Consistent cheerful endurance*
Deep concern for others	*Consistent hope—of self and others*

All this we are quite familiar with. But have we noticed the full significance of what he says ABOUT these things? He does not say all this is a very beautiful ideal, and perhaps it would be nice if we made some kind of a stab at doing it, sometime when we are not too busy judging and criticizing others.

Rather, he says THIS IS LOVE, the most vital, important thing in the world, and if we haven't got it, if we haven't by the Spirit-Word developed all these spiritual virtues, then we are "nothing"—NOTHING. It isn't really possible to be much less than nothing. That's rock-bottom.

The motive of ALL we do must be love—

Love of God Love of goodness Love of divine things

Love of all mankind—not because they are lovable, not because they deserve love, but because they need love, and only love coming on them from without and above has the power to transform them.

Love transforms. Nothing else can. God loved us, and if we will let that love flow into us, and work its work within us, it will completely transform us from ugly natural animals to characters of spiritual beauty.

The motive of all we do must be love, but in its detailed working out, that love is manifested in many different characteristics. This is our subject: To consider them, and EXAMINE OURSELVES BY THEM.

Let us first run over the list of the main ones, and then consider some in detail. And let us continually remember: these are not just desirable things, they are ESSENTIAL things, and without them we are on the natural, animal way to eternal death.

There are just two kinds of people: the living and the dead. The living are the few who have, and are motivated by, this power of divine love. And the dead are all the rest, who do not. There is no halfway: John plainly says—

"We have passed from death to life, IF we love the brethren."

The characteristics of this love which the Scriptures say we must have in abundance are—

Joy	*Patience*	*Thankfulness*	*Thirst for God's Word*
Peace	*Gentleness*	*Reconciliation*	*Zeal for God's House*
Virtue	*Self-control*	*Knowledge*	*Rejoicing in tribulation*
Holiness	*Goodness*	*Forgiveness*	*Singlemindedness*
Faith	*Meekness*	*Humility*	*Complete dedication*
Truth	*Godliness*	*Graciousness*	*Rigid tongue control—always*

And the opposite things that are forbidden, the things of death—

Anger	*Talebearing*	*Thinking evil of others*
Wrath	*Backbiting*	*Speaking evil of others*
Envy	*Covetousness*	*Suspecting evil motives*

And the many corruptions of the flesh that should not even need to be named among us.

Not only our inner motives, but our outward attitude, must be love. We cannot justify a harsh attitude by what we assume

is a loving motive. We must speak clearly and frankly, but always gently and kindly and affectionately—to win and to persuade, and not to condemn. (2 Tim. 2:24-25; Tit. 3:2)—

"The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves"

"Speak evil of no man: be gentle, showing all meekness to all men."

* * *

Spiritual transformation MUST be the biggest, most pressing matter in the forefront of our attention all our lives, if we hope for life. Eternal life is well within the reach of any who are WILLING TO PUT FORTH THE REQUIRED LIFELONG EFFORT—to make it their foremost and constant concern. Anything less is belittling God and His great promise of love.

God earnestly SEEKS men that He may save them. Victory is promised, yea, it is guaranteed "to him that overcometh." Overcometh WHAT? Clearly it is himself, his own flesh, his own lusts, his own natural thoughts and emotions and desires and reactions.

We have got to completely change our basic nature from conflict and antagonisms to love and gentleness.

This transformation of character is the "overcoming" that is required by God. It is a constant struggle. In many ways the problem becomes more deceptive as we advance in accomplishment in the Truth. Knowledge puffeth up. Achievement creates self-confidence (when in reality all good is of God). We can never relax, assuming we HAVE overcome, and the struggle is safely behind us. Greater, more searching tests are always, in the wisdom of God, likely to lie ahead—

"Every branch that beareth fruit, He PURGETH it, that it may bring forth MORE fruit" (Jn. 15:2).

We have GOT to completely change our whole natural character if we are going to be accepted by Christ. We are given our whole lifetime to do it, and it is the only really important thing in that lifetime. Everything else is very secondary. Anything in that lifetime that does not contribute to this one central purpose is precious time and effort wasted. If we do not accomplish this one thing—complete transformation of character, the overcoming of the natural flesh—then our whole life is a wasted struggle, a tragic failure, and any present "success" only compounds the tragedy.

Making rules and regulations for others, setting up standards of what we will and will not fellowship, is all very well, and to some extent necessary. But unless we bring our OWN hearts and lives and characters COMPLETELY under the rules and regulations of God, the beautiful, unearthly pattern of 1st Corinthians 13, then every rule we so righteously impose on anyone else is just one more nail in the lid of our own coffin—

"As ye judge, so shall ye be judged."

Let us never forget the very sober lesson of Jehu and his so-righteous "zeal for the Lord" (2 Kgs. 10:16). It doubtless truly WAS a "zeal for the Lord," and heads rolled in abundance as he exercised that zeal, but he was condemned for the bloodshed of that very zeal, though it was what God commanded, because while so zealous against others he did not judge and examine himself (2 Kgs. 10:30-31; Hos. 1:4).

Let us first make ourselves the something very special and unique and unearthly that the law of God requires of ALL claiming relation to Himself and His Son. THEN, if necessary, let us concern ourselves with others' sins.

Individual, spiritual transformation of character is the only solution to ecclesial problems. There is no use wasting time and effort on any other attempts at solutions. They do not get to the root of the problem. They may patch up, and paper over, but they do not purify. The trouble is rooted deep in the natural flesh. If brethren and sisters can be persuaded to let God completely transform their characters, then ecclesial problems can and will be solved. There is no other way to solve them.

Naturally, all of us are evil, quarrelsome, touchy, harsh, selfish, impatient, cruel, vengeful, spiteful, belligerent. It takes but very little irritation to bring all this out in ugly display. The vicious diabolos lurks very close below the surface in us all. This is the character of all human flesh without exception.

From fear, or self-interest, or indolence, or other motives, we suppress a lot of this, and, therefore, often manage to look pretty good on the surface. That may be good enough for getting along in the world, but for pleasing God we must go far deeper. We must introduce SPIRITUAL POWER. We must put something real and powerful and holy and beautiful in the place of the crude natural lusts of the flesh—the New Man, created after the image of God in holiness and true godliness.

All this must be the work of God in us. We cannot do it ourselves. Evil cannot create good. "In our flesh dwelleth no good thing"—

"It is GOD that worketh in you, both to will and to do, of His good pleasure."

Our part is to submit to the operation of God—to yield ourselves to God, completely, unreservedly, enthusiastically—to seek the operation of God upon us, and to be THANKFUL for it, no matter how bitter it may be, for this "God working in us" is very hard and crucifying to the natural flesh and its desires—

"I rejoice in tribulation, knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience worketh hope."

The main thing, the all-important thing, is to be able to examine ourselves, to be able to stand back and look at ourselves in all our natural ugliness—coldly, objectively, unemotionally—by the searching, revealing light of the Spirit-Word. And to do that we have got to KNOW the Word, learn it more and more, because, in the wisdom of God, the instruction is woven all through its many parts, in many forms.

If a man cannot be persuaded to "examine himself"—to critically and searchingly analyze his own thoughts and words and acts in the light of the divine Word, then any examination of him by anyone else is not going to accomplish much. The key to any break through out of the self-perpetuating darkness of the natural fleshly mind of all of us, is SELF-examination, with God's help, by the all-exposing Spirit-Word.

This must be a constant, continuous activity—to search our own dark and devious hearts and emotions; not morbidly, but cheerfully and constructively and hopefully. Success is guaranteed, if the right tools are used and the right effort is applied.

We shall find malignant cancer, but it can be cured. Truly the flesh is evil, we all have the cancer of sin eating us up, and the body of death is a curse and burden to the spiritual mind; but power is on our side, and success and cure is guaranteed, if we will honestly examine ourselves, and then follow through faithfully to the end.

Our daily reading of the Word of God must have a conscious plan and purpose. It must be mainly for the purpose of examining ourselves, and learning God's will concerning our OWN lives and characters.

The power is in the Word. If we are attentive, if we are receptive, we cannot help but feel, as we read over and over again the commands concerning character and kindness and

gentleness and joy and peace and godliness and love and patience and cheerful self-sacrifice, that THIS IS IT—this is the answer to everything, the ONLY answer. This is the only possible, satisfying, healthful, eternal reality; all else is passing, purposeless, meaningless chaff.

To attain to life, we have got to make the Word of God our principal interest, our principal study, our constant meditation. We must resolutely and relentlessly weed out all the passing worldly rubbish that tends to attract our interest and clutter our minds. Solomon says of the Word (Prov. 6:22-23)—

"When thou goest, it shall lead thee";
"When thou sleepest, it shall keep thee";
"When thou awakest, it shall talk with thee";
"For the commandment is a lamp, and the law is light."

This is the only possible way that we are going to be transformed into something that God can use. David says—

"O how LOVE I Thy law!" (Psa. 119:97).
"The Lord's statutes REJOICE the heart" (Psa. 19:8).
"His DELIGHT is the law of the Lord" (Psa. 1:2).

Love, Rejoice, Delight. This is the spirit and attitude we must have toward God's commands, especially to those that apply most directly to us, and that bear most heavily upon the natural fleshly mind. We must have this attitude, not only because of our deep love for God their Author, but for the law's own very beauty and wisdom, and the power to transform the ugly, fleshly, animal nature into a character that patterns Christ.

Once we have repudiated the natural flesh as evil, perceived within ourselves its ugly, sinful, death-tendencies, then we shall eagerly welcome anything that offers us deliverance, even though it bears hard upon us. We shall realize that the very laws that our natural flesh rebels most at, are the most necessary for our cleansing and training and development and beautification.

Over and over again in Scripture, we find the expression; "with ALL your heart." This is the essential qualification of everything that has to do with God. God not only demands to be first, He demands to be EVERYTHING. Thought of God, love for God, thanksgiving to God—have to dominate all we do or say—

"Meditate day and night . . ."
"Cry aloud after knowledge . . ."

"Lift up thy voice for understanding . . ."
"Search for it as for hid treasure . . ."

Such is the plain command. Do we really do this? And if we don't, what is our excuse? Is it an excuse that we shall be proud to offer at the judgment seat of Christ?

When we have to sit down and wait somewhere, do we thank God for the moment, and take out a pocket Bible to read or sit quietly and meditate on what we have read? Or do we automatically and thoughtlessly, like the animal world, reach for a rubbishy newspaper or magazine and scan mindlessly through its meaningless froth, prostituting to corruption the wonderful mind God has given us?

It is a question whether we know enough about the Word of God for it to be ABLE to guide us in all that we do, even if we wanted it to. We just don't study it enough. We just do not meditate on it enough. We just constantly have too much else on our minds and taking all our energy and attention.

Christ in Matthew 5 to 7 gives a very searching and detailed outline of the way of life he requires of all whom he will recognize as his. In every one of its many aspects it is diametrically opposed to the natural way of death. Summing up, he says very plainly: He that does these things shall stand; he that does them not shall fall.

Now, how many of us could sit down and write a list from memory of even ONE HALF of the commands in these three chapters? Let us try it. If we do not KNOW them, how can we possibly guide our daily life and every action by them?

* * *

The apostle John has some very strange and solemn words, words which though very simple, are very difficult for our human minds to fully grasp and comprehend—

"Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not."
"Whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, nor known him" (1 Jn. 3:6).
"Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin . . ."
"He CANNOT sin, because he is born of God" (1 Jn. 3:9).

Clearly what John is saying to us here is something very special, and worthy of deep study: something very unique, very unnatural. We know he is not speaking of perfection, of absolute sinlessness, for he himself makes that clear elsewhere (1 Jn. 1:8-10)—

"If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves":

"If we say we do no sin, we lie" (1 Jn. 1:8-10).
Then what DOES he mean by saying that—

"He CANNOT sin, because he is born of God?"

He is speaking of a consistent, wholly dedicated way of life that totally abhors sin and anything connected with sin, and that constantly strives to discern and repudiate its deceptive impulses within ourselves; eager and anxious, above all things, to please God and to do His will; to examine SELF very searchingly, and OTHERS very mercifully.

He that is truly "born of God" cannot sin voluntarily, cannot choose to sin, cannot entertain the idea of sinning. The thought is utterly abhorrent to him. Truly he DOES sin, through weakness—but never through deliberate choice.

Anyone that can deliberately sin, CHOOSE to sin—whatever sin, however "small"—has not been born of God. They are still in the flesh, in death. They may mean well, they may be trying, they may be on the way. But they have not yet made the great transfer of allegiance from death to life. They are still dead. They are still deliberate slaves of sin by choice. They have not yielded themselves unreservedly to God. Life has not yet happened to them.

He that is born of God may sin—through weakness—but he hates it, he repudiates it, it horrifies him, he confesses it, he struggles against it, and never gives up the struggle. He may, like David, sin terribly, but never deliberately. And any such failure is an anguish or remorse and grief to him, as it was to David forever thereafter.

Above all, he recognizes that overcoming sin in himself is life's main and only important concern. He gives his whole heart and soul to it, nothing else is important except that—with God's help and guidance—he discerns with himself and overcomes all the fleshly motions of sin. He never relaxes, and is never satisfied with himself, for he knows it is a lifelong struggle which in some ways gets more difficult and deceptive with development in the Truth—

"Every branch that beareth fruit, He PURGETH it, that it may bring forth MORE fruit."

* * *

Peter says (2 Pet. 1:5-7)—

"ADD to your faith virtue . . . knowledge . . . temperance . . . patience . . . godliness . . . brotherly-kindness . . . LOVE."

Here is a specific and detailed command, or rather, an orderly series of commands, a program of action and development. How far along it have we, in obedience, progressed? Peter further says that if these things ABOUND in us, they will give us an entrance to the Kingdom. If they do NOT abound, no entrance.

"Add to your faith VIRTUE."

Virtue here is goodness, excellence, moral worth, integrity, a repudiation of and separation from anything fleshly and unworthy of God and our high and holy calling in Christ. Faith must FIRST completely purify our hearts and thoughts and motives and emotions—swing us over completely to God's side, the side of purity and holiness. The natural heart is crude and lewd. The spiritual heart is wholesome and pure.

"Add to virtue KNOWLEDGE."

More and more knowledge of the Word of God, advancing from the milk to the meat, increasingly filling the mind with divine information and ideas and principles. This can only come by the expenditure of MUCH time and effort. The Scriptures give us no reason to think we can get the inestimable gift of eternal life in the divine nature without this effort. Any who truly value the gift will never be satisfied that they are giving sufficient time and effort.

"Add to knowledge TEMPERANCE."

This word, *egkrateia*, from *kratos*, strength, means self-control (as in Revised Version margin). It means having the body and actions completely under the control of the spiritually enlightened mind; not a slave to any lust or habit or emotion or fleshly feeling; never acting by impulse or emotion or desire, but always by calm, prayerful, well-thought-out Scriptural enlightenment and motive—with the help, and by the power, of God—

"It is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do."

* * *

"Add to self-control PATIENCE."

Patience, as scripturally used, means calm, cheerful, unmoved endurance under trial or provocation. It is not a mere negative, passive submission, but an active CARRYING ON, faithful and undisturbed, without doubt or despair. If we are in the way of God, we cannot lose, nothing can fail, EVERYTHING that happens is for eventual good. If we are not in the way of God, then nothing matters anyway: a brief flash, then eternal darkness.

Patience is not scriptural if it is not cheerful and loving. There is nothing more repulsive to the Spirit, or more gratifying to the flesh, than sullen, resentful, self-righteous, self-pitying "patience."

"Add to patience GODLINESS."

This word—*eusebeia*—means God-CENTERED-ness: a constant yearning for God, as so beautifully illustrated by David's Psalms: drawing toward God, a constant seeking to please God and to be as He wishes.

"Add to godliness LOVE OF THE BRETHREN,"
"And add to love of the brethren, LOVE."

There are two words for love used here, *phileo* and *agape.* They cover two aspects. *Phileo*—love of the brethren—is tender, personal affection. *Agape* is the higher, broader, more spiritual word: God is love—*agape*—universal benevolence. *Agape* is more spiritual and universal, but less intimate and personal. It is, however, impossible to draw an absolutely clear line between them, just as it is impossible to do so between the uses of "soul" and "spirit."

But, generally, and as used here by Peter, *phileo* is individual, tender, personal affection; while the final crowning addition to Peter's list—charity, *agape*—is universal goodness to all for a spiritual motive, an intense desire, because of the love of God, to serve the wellbeing of all mankind.

If we do not, by constant reflection on divine things, achieve in our hearts this supreme *agape* toward the whole human race, corrupt and evil as it sadly is, then we have not been "born of God"; we are still "in the flesh."

All this is very beautiful and inspiring, but the practical thing to remember is that all this is something we have GOT to have, and in ABUNDANT measure—

"IF these things be in you, and ABOUND, they make you that ye shall be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."

So says Peter, as he sums up. Without these rare spiritual virtues, in abundance, we ARE "barren and unfruitful."

* * *

Speaking of unfruitful, the first three "Fruits of the Spirit" are Love, Joy, and Peace. There is something peculiar about all three: they are not the kind of characteristics that we normally consider as coming by effort from WITHIN, but by CAUSE from without.

That is, we do not normally WILL to Love, but rather it is a result of external cause. Even more so with Joy—we do not will it, but we experience it as the result of something. And even yet more so with Peace.

This is true, and it is important to perceive it. ALL good must come to us from without, from above. We cannot will these things of ourselves. They must be caused from without. Within ourselves is "no good thing"—only evil and corruption (Rom. 7:18)

Why then tell us that these are characteristics—fruits—WE must bring forth? The answer lies in the fact that the Cause of all these things (and all the other fruits) is eternally existent and all-powerful. Our part—our duty—our only hope of life, is to perceive that Cause, to make effective contact with it, to let it work its purifying, beautifying, transforming work upon us.

If we truly learn and perceive the real facts of life, the eternal facts, the divine, spiritual facts which are revealed in God's Word, and if we put ourselves within the constant influence and consciousness of these facts, then Love and Joy and Peace will inevitably and irresistibly flow in upon us, and they will be the only possible way we can feel and act. There will be no room in our minds for anything except Love, Joy, and Peace.

Though mankind is evil and sunk deeply in sin, we must love them and wish them well, and seek to do them well—not so much for their sakes as for our own. To be part of God and Christ, our basic character must be love—a love that radiates out freely to all. This was Christ's great power among men.

There are different aspects to love. Truly Christ did not love his enemies in the same sense that he loved the apostle John. One was compassion and benevolence, the other was the deepest communion of mind and heart.

But he did love all men, and commiserate their weaknesses and evils and sorrows, and he was consumed with a zeal to help and comfort them, and turn them to the way of life and joy.

By nature, we are critical of others. This is how we build our ego. And surely there is plenty in all to be critical about, if that is what gives us our petty satisfactions. We can very "righteously" and rightly be critical of everyone and everything. The whole creation is stumbling along in vanity and corruption. But Jesus said—

> *"Live your enemies . . . Do good to them that hate you."*

Most of us seem to have tremendous trouble even loving our brethren—those companions God has given us in the Way of Life—let alone our enemies. It seems to take so little to create coldness and ill-feeling, to set in motion criticism and talebearing and faultfinding and bitterness and rumor-mongering. This is the sad measure of the shallowness of our faith in God and love for one another.

There is a cure, a guaranteed, infallible cure: the Word of God continually, self-searchingly studied; the commands of God put into wholesome, flesh-mortifying practice.

Joy and Peace are clear commands, essential ingredients of the only character that is acceptable to God. If we do not have Joy and Peace in deep spiritual measure, then we have not been "born of God," and we are in no position to criticize, correct, or legislate for others, for we are in deep spiritual poverty ourselves, in great need of merciful help. We shall receive mercy only if our basic character is to extend mercy.

Love, Joy, and Peace are fruits of the spirit—the spirit of Christ. And if we haven't got the fruits, we haven't got the spirit, and we are "none of his" (Rom. 8:9). This is quite clear from the following—

"The statutes of the Lord REJOICE the heart" (Psa. 19:8).

"Let those that trust Thee REJOICE, let the righteous SHOUT FOR JOY" (Psa. 5:11).

True trust makes fulness of joy inevitable. Let us measure our faith by our degree of constant, loving, spiritual joy.

"The righteous doth SING and REJOICE" (Prov. 29:6)

That is one of their clear and unmistakable identifications. If they don't sing and REJOICE IN EVERYTHING, THEY ARE NOT RIGHTEOUS.

"These things have I spoken, that your joy might be full" (Jn. 15:11).

"Ask and ye shall receive, that your joy might be full" (Jn. 16:24).

Glorious divine provision has been made for us that our joy may be ALWAYS FULL. If it is not, then let us forget about others' faults for a while, and diligently find out and correct what is wrong with ourselves. Let us get "born of God" by the Word.

If we have this joy in God that Jesus promises, this tremendous sense of rejoicing and thanksgiving and gratitude and worship and love—if we have this, then we cannot possibly

have hurt feelings, or fault-finding, or strife, or any kind of bitterness to anyone, especially to our brethren. Paul says several times—

"In EVERYTHING give thanks."

This is the measure of our faith in the divine assurance that—

"ALL things work together for them that love God."

In some things in this present vale of tears, the good is hard or impossible for us to see with our present limited understanding, as it was to Job. But Faith will believe it is there, and Wisdom will seek to learn the lesson to be learned, and the development of character that is intended.

We are not on this earth for present pleasure or satisfaction. We are here solely for a life-long course of training and development for the most glorious destiny imaginable. EVERYTHING—good or evil, light or dark—is working toward that end for the sons of God. Therefore EVERYTHING without exception calls for thanksgiving to God, even as Paul says—

"Rejoice in tribulation" (Rom. 5:3).

This requires a complete transformation of the natural outlook. This is one of the things that are "foolishness" to the natural man whose realities are limited to the animal present.

"Rejoice in the Lord ALWAYS" (Phil. 4:4).

"Rejoice EVERMORE" (1 Thess. 5:16).

"Believing, ye rejoice with JOY UNSPEAKABLE" (1 Pet. 1:8).

"Be GLAD in the Lord, and REJOICE, ye righteous" (Psa. 32:11).

We DARE not ignore these commands. And they ARE commands. They are the only way to spiritual health. If we do not constantly and thankfully rejoice in God, we are sick in our minds. These commands are the only cure for the loathesome disease of the natural fleshly mind.

And Peace is just as clearly commanded and required as Joy. It is commanded in the sense that we MUST—with God's instructions and God's help—get ourselves into the spiritual and mental condition that irresistibly creates Peace—

"Great peace have they that love Thy Law, and nothing—NOTHING—shall offend them" (Psa. 119:165).

Here is a clear declaration that IF we really do love the Law of God—love it in the Bible sense of giving it all our heart and attention, then we SHALL have great peace, and we shall never take offense at anything. The contrary is also clearly implied: If we do not have great peace, if we do take offense, then we do not love the Law, we have not been "born of God."

"To be spiritually minded is PEACE" (Rom. 8:6).

Again, it is entirely up to us. We are COMMANDED to be spiritually minded. We are told HOW to become spiritually minded. If we do not have peace—perfect peace, the "peace that passeth understanding"—then we have not been obedient, we are unfaithful stewards, we have "neglected so great salvation."

"LET the peace of God rule in your hearts" (Col. 3:15).

Again, putting the responsibility for peace squarely on ourselves. If we follow the commands (AND they are many, AND they take all life's activity and energy, AND there are no shortcuts), then we are guaranteed peace.

It is very clear, from the principles that Christ lays down, that if we do not have, and MANIFEST, the fruits of the Spirit in abundance, then THAT must be our first concern, and we have no time, and are in no fit position, to legislate for others.

* * *

ANGER. There are three very interesting statements concerning anger, especially interesting because of the Authorized Version translation—

"Angry WITHOUT A CAUSE" (Matt. 5:22).

"Love is not EASILY provoked" (1 Cor. 13:5).

"Not SOON angry" (Tit. 1:7).

The weakening qualifications: "without cause, easily, and soon," are not in the original. The commands condemn human anger without qualification. The Revised Version omits the first two qualifications; the Diaglott omits all three.

To justify anger in man, it is customary to refer to Christ exhibiting anger. We might just as well justify violence because he drove the moneychangers from the Temple. He was acting for God, directly, by direct inspiration of the Spirit. But the commands for US are crystal clear—

"The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God" (Jam. 1:20).

"Put away ALL wrath and anger" (Eph. 4:21).

"Anger resteth in the bosom of fools" (Ecc. 7:9).

"Put off ALL these: anger, wrath, etc." (Col. 3:8).

"The works of the flesh . . . wrath" (Gal. 5:19-20).

Christ, Paul, and Stephen all give us beautiful examples of not only forgiving enemies, but sincerely praying for their forgiveness and wellbeing, not only without the seeking of forgiveness BY those enemies, but in the very face of their active and deadly enmity.

If our forgiveness, as some claim, has to wait for others' repentance and humble seeking of forgiveness, then most of our commanded forgiving will never get done at all, and our minds and hearts will be increasingly poisoned and embittered by accumulated grievances.

Paul gives a vital command, widely ignored (Rom. 15:1-3)—

"We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves."

"Let every one please his neighbor for HIS good to edification. Even Christ pleased not himself."

Now, we all think we are among the "strong," although we may not admit it, even to ourselves. If we did not think we were strong we would be spending much more time and effort trying to GET strong. So we are apparently quite satisfied that more effort than we are doing in this direction is quite unnecessary, and we are quite strong enough. Effort will always be in reverse ratio to self-satisfaction.

How much then, of this spirit of pleasing our neighbor (or brother) for HIS good is there among us? What do we actually DO—what do we actually FOREGO—for the sake of others? For the peace of mind of others? To satisfy and quieten the scruples and misgivings of others—unjustified though they may be?

Here is the unerring measure of our supposed brotherly love—the love which indicates whether we have passed from death to life.

IF we love our brethren (as we say we do), then we shall joyfully SEEK such opportunities to manifest that love by sacrifice on their behalf. Paul says in this connection (1 Cor. 8:12-13)—

"When ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye SIN AGAINST CHRIST."

"Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend."

Only those who willingly and lovingly follow Paul in this are Christ's brethren. All others are "in the flesh," whatever their pretentions or appearances. If we knowingly do ANYTHING that offends or troubles another, or in any way weakens them or influences them to think or act wrongly, then we are SINNING AGAINST CHRIST, and thus cutting ourselves off from all hope of life. This is one of the great and searching ways in which God tests our love for others, to see if we really have "passed from death to life," or if it is just pretense.

GRACE. Graciousness: basic, inward, gentle, Christlike graciousness to all, under all circumstances—

"We beheld his glory: full of Grace and Truth . . . And of his fulness have we all received, and grace for grace" (Jn. 1:14-16).

But HAVE we? Where is this beautiful spiritual Grace we claim to have received? Have we received from Christ—do we manifest—this vital spiritual ingredient of true holiness: Grace, graciousness and kindness and gentleness to all? Or do we, thinking we are serving God, manifest the fleshly, self-righteous "Off with his head" attitude of Jehu—

"Come and see my zeal for the Lord!"

Truly Jehu had great zeal, and he wielded the sword of destruction with marvelous enthusiasm and vigor, and very efficiently and ruthlessly. But his sad history revealed that it was not a true Christlike zeal for the Lord and for holiness and love. Many have a destructive, tearing down "zeal for the Lord."

* * *

RICHES. Paul commanded Timothy (1 Tim. 6:17-18)—

"Charge them that are rich in this world that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute . . ."

—*eumetadotos:* literally, "good at giving away"—

". . . willing to communicate . . ."

Literally—"willing to fellowship, share, have things in common."

By scriptural standards, most of us are rich—indecently rich. That is, we have and we handle far more than is required for the basic necessities of life. Most of it goes for luxuries and lusts, keeping up with the world, an opulent convenience-and-gadget-loaded establishment. We quaintly regard as "necessities" things that would turn the rich of Bible times green with envy.

"Having food and raiment, therewith be content."

So Paul COMMANDS in the same context. What does this really mean? Where does it all end?—

"Give us this day our daily bread."

"This day"; that's all. Not a hoard for the future, like the rich fool of Christ's searching parable. And BREAD, not meat. Meat was far from a daily thing in Bible times. Americans eat many times more meat than the Japanese. They are far more murderous and violent, and they have many times more heart trouble. There may be no connection, but it is interesting. We

live in the midst of a degenerate, bloated, artificial, mad merry-go-round lifestyle, and we unconsciously absorb it.

"Sell what thou hast, and give alms: provide yourselves treasure in the heavens" (Lk. 12:33).

"He that soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly . . . God loveth a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:6-7).

FAITH. The key thought on Faith is—

"Faith without Works is dead" (Jam. 2:26).

Faith is an all-consuming, overpowering assurance and conviction that possesses the heart, and controls and motivates all actions. Our faith is what we DO, not what we say, even to ourselves. Faith doesn't just happen—

"Faith cometh by HEARING, and hearing by the WORD OF GOD."

And the Faith God requires, the Faith that moves mountains, the Faith of Hebrews 11, does not come by brief or superficial hearing, but by constant, lifelong, deeply-attentive study and meditation.

It is what we DO that reveals where our Faith really is, and who we really believe—our own hearts and possessions, or God. Where we put our life's efforts and interests exposes WHAT our Faith is really in. We can each easily add it up for ourselves. Let us face it: time for present things; time for God's things. Set them beside each other—and draw your own conclusions.

Faith in God will lead to a complete and consistent Way of Life and a course of action that is folly to the mind of the flesh. The worthies of old all had their faith severely tested to the very breaking point. They were forced to make choices that involved great peril and great sacrifices. By a living, active Faith under terribly trying circumstances they earned a good report, though often it cost them all their worldly possessions and even life itself. They did not forge the sinews of their Faith sitting idly in their slippers in air-conditioned or steam-heated comfort. From a natural point of view their course was folly, utter stupidity, suicide.

* * *

MEEKNESS, LOWLINESS, HUMILITY. These qualities, though essential, are hard to pin down. They are probably the most faked and counterfeited characteristics of Godliness. Everyone takes for granted that he is "humble," even the pompous Pope of Rome. Many are proud of their humility, and boast about it, even in their prayers to God. If we say we are

humble, we probably are not, for the truly humble realize the deceptiveness of pride, and could not possibly advertise their humility.

But these things—meekness, lowliness, humility are vitally important. It would pay us to make the prayerful effort to get to the bottom of what they really mean, and really understand and practice them. Jesus said—

"Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find REST UNTO YOUR SOULS" (Matt. 11:29).

If we are never offended or upset about what others do or say to us, if we truly do have peace and "rest in our souls," if we do not need to buttress our ego and our self-confidence and our standing before men with possession of material things, if we can take correction and criticism with thanksgiving even if it is grossly unfair, if we would never dream of talking about our humility or calling ourselves humble—then perhaps we have made some little headway in achieving this elusive but essential quality of spiritual wisdom.

Pride, lust, and greed are the three basic drives of sinful flesh. Together, these three constitute the "wisdom of this world"—the basic principles it operates by. These ARE the world, the root of all it does.

The Word of God, and it alone, gives us the power to discern and overcome them in ourselves. Quite often slothfulness and disobedience masquerade as humility. We know we are not doing what we should, or any where near as much as we should, and we effusively and "humbly" parade our lack of zeal and effort as if it were some virtue, and as if confession and display of it absolved us from doing anything about it. Paul says to the Romans—

"Present your bodies a LIVING SACRIFICE" (Rom. 12:1-2).

What does "living sacrifice" mean to us? Paul is unmistakably speaking of giving the whole life without reserve. And he says this is our "reasonable service." That is, this command is nothing special or unusual, for just a special few, but is the REASONABLE thing expected of ALL. And after we have fulfilled it to the fullest, we are instructed to say (and MEAN)—

"We are unprofitable servants."

Paul continues in Romans 12:2—

"Be not conformed to this world."

WHY not? Because the world's whole structure is based on the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—

and this is the way of death. In many things we must of necessity be conformed to some extent to the world—our houses, our clothes, our food, our occupations, we drive cars, etc.

But none of this should be done thoughtlessly and sheeplikely and automatically, by blind custom, just because everyone else does it. Every item and aspect must be individually thought out and tested by the Word: Does this particular thing fit into the Way of Life? Is it a practical and useful necessity in accomplishing God's work, or is it a useless part of the world's false and fleshly fabric of activity and custom?

Is it (and we shall so often find it IS) another aspect of the universal wine of the Roman Harlot by which all nations are drunk? Surely it is vitally necessary that we ask ourselves this in December of all times, when the Harlot's wine flows so freely. It is so fatally easy just to do something without thought or study or realizing its evil connections and significances—to drift along in it on the way to death, just because the superstitious and idolatrous world does it—

> *"Come ye out of her, My people! Be not partakers of her sins!"*

But most importantly, we should not be conformed to the world in their motives and purposes and the reasons they do things—ambition and pride and greed and fear and pleasure-seeking; retaliation and bigotry and animosity and selfishness—

> *"Be not conformed to the world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind."*

Here is our principal, lifelong task, clearly expressed, that upon which our eternal destiny depends. That divine character to which we must be transformed is clearly set out in many commands of Scripture, and it is of surpassing beauty.

The great danger is that, because of its unearthly beauty and its great difference from the natural way of the flesh, and its great rarity in the earth, we tend not to realize its vital NECESSITY as a divine requirement, but rather brush it off as some far-off ideal vaguely aimed at but never come to grips with in this busy, everyday existence. But Paul pointedly continues—

> *"That ye may prove* (manifest or demonstrate) *what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God"* (Rom. 12:2).

Not talk about it, but show it—show to all men what alone is "acceptable." We have got to demonstrate this required

character to the world. This is an essential part of preaching the Gospel. Just talking is no good; we must demonstrate the Gospel's *POWER* in our own lives to the full transforming extent of the Scriptural command.

Belief is ACTION. Faith is shown by WORKS. How could anyone believe us if we ourselves do not believe it strongly enough to really DO it? Earnest example is far more powerful and persuasive than mere empty exhortation or critical condemnation.

Let us first SHOW IN OURSELVES that we are a holy, pure, zealous, royal, spiritual priesthood—a beacon of divine light in an evil fleshly world. Let us manifest a pure embodiment of divine, self-sacrificing love and patience and concern for the welfare of all mankind. THEN perhaps we can legitimately start judging others.

We tend to think of all these things as simply exhortation, and we judge ourselves very leniently on them. But let us realize they are all COMMANDS; clear, specific, divine, inescapable commands—just as baptism is a command. Would we expect to be saved without baptism? Then why should we expect to be saved if we ignore these other commands?

Let us not deceive ourselves. The stakes are far too great. The call—the requirement—is very, very high. But it is quite possible—quite attainable—for all who are willing to do what is asked. It is not for the half-hearted. We are either something very outstanding, very special, very beautiful in character—or we are pitiful, self-deluded hypocrites—animals grotesquely masquerading as angels.

Let us, above all, not brush off the terrible urgency of this matter by complacently presuming on God's mercy. That is the fatal error of the churches. That is "sinning that grace may abound."

There will be vast room—and vast need—for God's abundant mercy AFTER we have done the very most and best that is humanly possible. Anything less than our best does not even call God's mercy into operation.

And on this matter of mercy, so essential to us all, let us ever remember with trembling that (Jam. 2:13)—

> *"He shall have judgment without mercy that hath showed no mercy."*

What is so urgently needed among us in these last closing days, 125 years after the revival of the Truth in the earth by the tremendous labors of brethren Thomas and Roberts, is not

new divisions and subdivisions based on new requirements of fellowship that condemn these faithful pioneers as incompetent and deficient in Saving Truth.

But what is needed is brethren and sisters searchingly examining THEMSELVES; brethren and sisters who are truly "born of God," and who manifest all the unearthly beauties that God has prescribed and PROMISED TO CREATE AND DEVELOP in those who are part of the glorious New Man in Christ Jesus, renewed in righteousness and true holiness after the image of Him Who created him—

"LET A MAN EXAMINE HIMSELF . . . LET US ARISE AND BUILD!"

God Gave Them Up

"The invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and divinity, so that they are without excuse" (Rom. 1:20).

ROMANS CHAPTERS 1 AND 2

Paul's letter to the brethren and sisters at Rome is very deeply doctrinal, but it is also very personal. He mentions nearly forty specific individuals in chapter 16, beside several references to households.

We must always remember that the Truth is a *personal* thing—a matter of personal relationships to others—not a mathematical or technical or coldly individual thing. Paul says in chapter 1 that without ceasing he made mention of them always in his prayers. This is not exaggeration: This was Paul's whole heart and life.

First and above all, the whole meaning and power of the Truth is an intense personal relationship to God and Christ—

> *"This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent"* (Jn. 17).

Not just to know *of* them. Not even just to know *about* them: to know the truth concerning them (though that is truly vital in itself). But to *know them personally* as close and intimate companions, far more intimate and closer to us than anyone else can possibly be.

It is quite possible—and if we observe ourselves we shall often catch ourselves falling into it—it is quite possible to work diligently all day long on the work of God, and not once think of Him as a personal, living Reality, as a Friend, as a Companion, in terms of closeness, and affection, and communion. Yet this is the very essence of the Truth. This is the central, heart-purpose for which all else is designed. We may feel we are "always abounding in the work of the Lord," but it is meaningless if it is not built upon this.

There is no point, no value, no life, in doing God's work if there is not an ever-conscious personal relationship at the heart of it. It is this personal, affectionate relationship to God and Christ that draws us from evil, and strengthens us in good. Nothing else can.

In our poor, so-brief little life-span, the basic purpose of *all* that we do must be the schooling and purifying and developing

and transforming of our own character. Knowledge is good. Knowledge is essential. But knowledge is just a means to an end—not an end in itself. *Character* is the vital thing that knowledge must be creating—spirituality, holiness, integrity, purity, beauty. We are being put through exercises and experiences to create holiness. Even Jesus himself "learned obedience by the things that he suffered" and was "made perfect through suffering."

God does not actually *need* us to do anything for Him. All that we do for Him is training for ourselves. Now this needs qualifying to avoid misunderstanding. God does not need any particular one of us, but in His wise divine purpose there is work to be done by man, and the work itself is important. In the plan God has devised faithful servants are an essential part. It has pleased Him to condescend to make His beloved children co-workers with Himself.

And we must always be mindful that *all* we ever do of any good is God's working in us, and not of ourselves (Phil. 2:13)—

> *"It is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do of His good pleasure."*

Our part is to yield, to submit, to conform, to put away other things that waste our time (*God's* time, for all belongs to Him) and distract our interest, to maintain our attention in the right direction, to discern and cooperate with the shaping and molding hand.

And further, character is not a self-centered operation. It is the very opposite. We cannot be holy in a selfish vacuum. We cannot turn inward and just work out our own salvation as if others did not exist, though that may be tempting to the flesh. It is so selfishly pleasant to get off into our own little corner of isolation.

Character is essentially a self-forgetting, outgoing relationship, primarily to God and Christ, but also to all members of the Body of Christ, and in a more general sense to the whole suffering world. Paul is our example, as Christ was his. He wrote similarly to other ecclesias as he does here to the believers in Rome—

> *"Without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers"* (1:9).

His concern was for every member (2 Cor. 11:29)—

> *"Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is offended, and I burn not?"*

Paul's whole life was the love and fellowship and welfare of his brethren; intense empathy with and sympathy for them. About three years after writing this letter, as he approached Rome as a prisoner, this same group of brethren came out thirty-five miles to meet him—

> *"Whom, when Paul saw, he thanked God and took courage"* (Rom. 28:15).

But, just about another five years later, in his final tribulation—on trial for his life, about to be offered—in this same city of Rome, he had to sadly say, like his Master before him (2 Tim. 4:16)—

> *"At my first answer no man stood with me, but all forsook me."*

And he gave thanks to God for one lone, faithful brother in the whole city who diligently sought him out in his cell, and found him, and refreshed him, and "was not ashamed of his chain." In the conditions then prevailing, doubtless this loyal Onesiphorus risked his own life to succor Paul.

> *"I long to see you"* (1:11).

He never visited the ecclesia at Rome, though from chapter 16 it is clear he knew many of the members. He longed to see them that he might impart to them some spiritual benefit, and—

> *"That I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me"* (1:12).

This is, and *must* be, the reason for our visiting and associating with one another, and this aspect must be constantly borne in mind. Any time of our association not spent for this purpose is time wasted, unfaithful stewardship, lost opportunity.

There are, of course, many different ways, direct and indirect, by which this purpose may be furthered, and, therefore, we must be slow and careful in judging others' activities, because we do not know their motive. But let *us* be sure that we ourselves bear this ever in mind, and that this is always *our* motive. Our constant goal must be to do *everything* we do to the glory of God and to spiritual upbuilding of both ourselves and others. All else is empty, animal folly, leading only to rejection and death.

> *"I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, but was hindered hitherto"* (1:13).

This is interesting. Paul had many times planned to visit Rome, but so far had not been able to do so. At the time he was writing, it had been about seven years since he had first gotten as far as Corinth—the closest he had been to Rome. It was his practice, as is clear from the history in Acts and from what he says to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 10:13-16) to gradually work toward Rome, establishing ecclesias and fields of activity on the way.

We know, too, of course, that he was guided by the Spirit, both directly and indirectly, as to where to carry the Gospel. He had recently spent three years in Ephesus, as headquarters for evangelizing Asia Minor—first detained there by the tremendous opportunities and also by the opposition the Truth was receiving; and then he was suddenly driven away from Ephesus by the great uproar and agitation created under the leadership of Demetrius the silversmith.

So we see Paul's life was guided and laid out for him by the Spirit, often with great danger and violence and abruptness, and often in ways we would think strange, such as long periods in prison when he just ached and agonized to be out preaching the Gospel. But the enforced confinement, though a physical hardship, would be an opportunity for study and meditation, and for writing many needed letters of comfort and instruction that a busy outside active life would have prevented.

Certainly Paul never wasted his time, whether in prison or not, nor did he use his hardships and confinement as an excuse to neglect the service of his Lord, for he writes from prison (Phil. 1:12-14)—

> *"The things which happened unto me have fallen out unto the furtherance of the Gospel, so that MY BONDS FOR CHRIST ARE MANIFEST IN ALL CAESAR'S COURT AND IN ALL OTHER PLACES."*
>
> *"And many of the brethren of the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the Word without fear."*

Such was the power of a fearless and faithful example.

> *"I AM NOT ASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST, FOR IT IS THE POWER OF GOD UNTO SALVATION TO EVERY ONE THAT BELIEVETH"* (1:16).

First of all, this is an important verse as to the vital necessity for salvation of believing the One True Gospel of the Kingdom. But why does Paul say, writing to *brethren*, that he was not *ashamed* of it? Why should there be any thought that he might be?

The Gospel is a simple, "unlearned," unworldly thing. It requires simple, unworldly people to believe it and value it. The Gospel, in its simple beauty was providentially unearthed for our benefit in these last days by the labors of brethren Thomas and Roberts.

There were those in Paul's day, and have been ever since, who—enamored of worldly learning—were not satisfied with the simple teaching of the Gospel. They were, in effect, ashamed of it. It did not appeal to the worldly wise, or the speculative-minded. They desired greater scope for worldly learning and philosophy and theory.

Why is the Gospel the "power of God unto salvation?—

> *"For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith"* (1:17).

To Paul, this is a key Old Testament passage: *"The just shall live by faith."* In these early chapters of Romans, Paul is establishing the truth of salvation *by faith*, as against salvation *by works*. He is contrasting a gracious *gift* of eternal life with legally *earned* life.

But he is certainly not contrasting faith with righteousness or with obedience or with holiness. Rather he is establishing faith as the only gateway to, and power of righteousness—

> *"Therein is the RIGHTEOUSNESS of God revealed from faith to faith."*

Instead of—

> *"The just* (or righteous) *shall live by faith."*

—the Diaglott and some other versions have it more clearly—

> *"The righteous by faith, shall live."*

That is to say—

> *"He who becomes righteous through faith, shall live."*

Faith is not an end in itself, but a means to an end, a power to accomplish an end: *"Faith without works is dead."* Faith, if it does not lead to works, produce works, is dead. Faith is never a substitute for holiness. To the Hebrews, in very direct and decisive exhortation, Paul says plainly (12:14)—

> *"WITHOUT HOLINESS SHALL NO MAN SEE GOD."*

And the context clearly shows that he is not giving a soothing assurance of something that will flutter down from heaven upon us at the last day. Rather he is solemnly warning us of something that *must* be accomplished by the mighty power of faith and love *right now*. If we hope for salvation, we had better give far more attention to this matter of holiness, and what it

involves of transformation of our lives, than most—in or out of the Truth—appear willing to give. Surely this is very clear from the next verse in Romans—

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against ALL ungodliness and unrighteousness of men" (1:18).

We should note the "all," for it is essential to Paul's line of reasoning. In reading the stomach-turning description of natural human corruption that follows, we are apt to be put off the track by its very vileness. Paul gives as examples some of the *worst* forms of unrighteousness, but he is speaking of *all* unrighteousness, large and small. Often the only difference between big sins and little ones is that the little ones take less courage, and are more cowardly and despicable. This is not to belittle serious sins, but to illustrate the deadly seriousness of what *we* may consider "minor" sins. It is fatal to belittle any sin, however "small." If we can deliberately *choose* to sin—deliberately, knowingly choose to do anything displeasing to God and contrary to His law of holiness, then it does not matter how small or big it is, as it is always deadly, because the *heart* is wrong. Any heart that can choose to displease God in order to please the flesh is still dead in sin; it has not been reborn and transformed to the way of life and love—

"Whosoever is born of God DOTH NOT COMMIT SIN . . . he CANNOT SIN, because he is born of God" (1 Jn. 3:9).

Such may repeatedly stumble and fail, but they will be quick to cleanse themselves with repentance and tears, and renewed efforts to overcome.

Why is the wrath of God against all unrighteousness? Verses 19-20 are very significant. They state very decisively *God's* view on a very important issue, especially important today, in the light of man's current learned foolishness—

"Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them, for God hath showed it unto them. For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are CLEARLY SEEN, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead (divinity), *so that they are WITHOUT EXCUSE"* (1:19-20).

God considers that in His works of creation He has given unmistakable and overwhelming evidence of His power and His divinity; that is, His supreme nature and position. Observing the works of creation, both within himself and around him,

man has absolutely no excuse for not clearly recognizing the existence and the hand of God, and seeking knowledge of God, and submitting to God.

There is absolutely no excuse for the new, modern, man-centered superstition of "Evolution." It does not rate a moment's consideration, any more than the absurdities of "learned" Platonic mythology. It is a tissue of impossibilities woven to obscure the reality and authority of the holy, sin-hating God Who is everywhere obvious in His mighty works, staring man in the face. That is *God's* view, and it is conclusive, and we must thankfully recognize its truth and justice. On the strength of God's testimony here, we can be absolutely sure that anyone who is so abysmally blind as not to be able to see God in Creation has nothing of value to tell us about that Creation.

Daily, almost hourly, in this marvelous modern age of investigation, we are ever anew struck by the fantastic wonders of the infinite intricacies of created things. The deeper man probes into the construction of living things, the more wonderful are the things he finds in evidence of wisdom and power and design, and the more utterly impossible the superstition of evolution is shown to be.

> *". . . SO THAT THEY ARE WITHOUT EXCUSE BECAUSE THAT, WHEN THEY KNEW GOD, THEY GLORIFIED HIM NOT AS GOD, NEITHER WERE THANKFUL, BUT BECAME VAIN IN THEIR IMAGINATIONS, AND THEIR FOOLISH HEART WAS DARKENED. PROFESSING THEMSELVES TO BE WISE, THEY BECAME FOOLS"* (1:20-22).

What a perfect description of modern, "learned" man! If this was true of the pagan Roman world, with their very limited knowledge of the details of the construction of all living things, what must be the stupidity and guilt of man today? No wonder Christ is to be revealed from heaven in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who refuse to face the reality and authority of God!

> *"Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves. Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than* (better, margin: rather than, instead of) *the Creator . . . For this cause God gave them up to vile affections"* (1:24-26).

And verse 28—

"God gave them over to a reprobate mind (margin: mind void of judgment) *to do those things which are not convenient."*

Again, a perfect description of modern, "evolutionary" man. What time has ever been like today in this respect of moral uncleanness and "vile affections?" Not that these abominations are new. From the days of Sodom—and doubtless from before the Flood—this has been the nature and bent of the common, groveling, unclean human animal. Ancient Greece, the philosophical brains of the ancient world, with the marvelous, timeless beauty and splendor of its art and literature and architecture, is proverbial for vile abominations and immorality.

But with the rise of Christianity—even a corrupted Christianity—these vile things were relegated to darkness, and a veneer of respectability and religion was carefully laid over the "Christian" world. Men at least had a "*form* of godliness." Officially, these vile things of the flesh were condemned and proscribed. Laws were passed against them, as far as any public activity was concerned. And those laws have remained, and been enforced, up until very recently, well within memory.

But today, within the past twenty years or so, the holy laws of God against these abominations—long recognized and outwardly accepted, if not actually obeyed—have been cast aside. And foremost in the new Canaanitish trend are those so-called "Christian" religious bodies who claim the duty and privilege of teaching and upholding the pure and holy Word of God.

Fornication, divorce, and homosexuality—the very abominations specified as against which God's wrath is revealed from heaven—are now openly embraced and condoned and defended, yea, glorified, by the large and once-respectable religious denominations.

Surely, this is both a wonderful sign of the time of the end—"as it was in the days of Lot"—and a wonderful testimony to the timelessness of the pure and holy Word of Him Who changeth not!

But there is a great and sobering lesson for *us* in these things, as we see the great churches of the world oozing and dripping with the leprosy of Canaanite immorality. There is a deep underlying principle that explains this phenomenon, and that comes much closer home. It is in that three-fold knell of

hopeless doom of verses 24, 26, and 28: "*God gave them up.*" Terrible words!—

"*God gave them up to uncleanness . . .*"
"*God gave them up to vile affections . . .*"
"*God gave them up to a mind void of judgment.*"

Let us ponder those words, and tremble. Where much is given, much is required, and we have been given very, very much of the goodness and revelation and condescension of God in these last days. Because they chose the *first steps* in a certain path, God gave them up to go all the way—to uncleanness, to vile affection, and finally, to a mind void of judgment, hopeless of return. And these vile things are now lapping at the doors of the ecclesias. It seems clear that many who bear the name Christadelphian are very shallowly rooted. Their thinking (or rather, feeling) flows with the vissicitudes of the world; they sway with the world's fashions, they sway with the world's morals. Things unknown and abhorred among us a generation ago now press at the doors, simply because the world's morals and manner have changed.

There is no safety except in complete, wholehearted dedication and allegiance and service to God. Come ye out from among them and be ye separate, *separate*, SEPARATE! What does it mean? Does it mean anything to us? Do we *tremble* at the Word? Has it all become so commonplace and thoughtless?

God *may* give us till tomorrow to repent, to put away the thick clogging clay of worldly interests and lusts and pleasures and pursuits. He *may* give us till tomorrow to decide to give all our heart and soul and mind and spirit to Him. He may, and we fervently hope and pray that He will; *but we have no assurance that He will.* We dare not presume on it. He may "give us UP." He is infinitely longsuffering when His wisdom so dictates, and He sees reason so to be; but He will not be mocked, and He is also a consuming fire.

* * *

Chapter 1 was about the Gentiles. Chapter 2 is directed toward the Jew. The message is different, but the underlying principle is the same. The Jew—and rightly so—condemned the vile abominations and superstitions of the learned and "modern" Gentile: the so-capable Roman, the scientific and philosophic Greek. But the Jew did not see the true picture. It is easy to see the faults of others. They (v. 17) rested in the Law of Moses, and made their boast of God.

Naturally speaking, the Jew had reason to boast. They had a holy, just, and good national Law, direct from the hand of God, that is still today—3,500 years after it was given—not only unsurpassed but *completely unapproached* by any of man's tinkering, ever-changing, jigsaw of special interest legislation. Israel was given a pure and beautiful religion and national form of joyful, ennobling worship; a rigid code of cleanliness and morality, wisely and necessarily enforced with the death penalty to prevent festering corruption; no permanent ownership of the land; no interest charges (the root of all social injustice and oppression); no jails (tax-supported crime factories); debts worked out by honest labor with a six-year limit and a guaranteed generously-underwritten new start; one year in every seven a complete rest and rejoicing in worship of God; every fifty years an entire new national beginning for everyone on a fair and equal basis, wiping the whole slate of accumulated inequality.

Man has never dreamed of anything like this, and he could not make it work if he did. But this glorious national law was underwritten by God Himself, and *guaranteed* to work: no disease, no poverty, no fear or insecurity—IF they would do their part.

And the Jew had a wonderful 2,000-year history of the Almighty God of heaven manifesting Himself to and working with their ancestors as His special people above all others on earth.

No wonder the Jew despised the Gentile, with their hodge-podge legislation all in favor of the powerful, just like today; and their hobgoblin pagan Platonic superstition, just like today.

But the Jew forgot that where much is given, much is required, and as Paul reminded them in verse 11—

"There is no respect of persons with God."

And the Jews never realized that their wonderful, God-given Law was not to glorify them but to humble and condemn them so that they would look tremblingly to the mercy of God; not to give them pride but humility; not to make them confident of their righteousness, but to make them keenly conscious of the hopelessness of their weakness and sinfulness, apart from the love of God.

What Paul is leading up to, and what comes out more clearly in chapter 3, is that all mankind—Gentile and Jew—are

sinners without exception, and have no hope of escape from death except in Christ.

Truly there are different degrees of sinfulness. Open rebellion is a far different thing from helpless human failure and weakness, sincerely striven against and repented of. But both are sin, and both are fatal, apart from the way of redemption in Christ. This the Jew could not see, and cannot see today. As Paul says in 3:19—

> *"Now we know that what things soever the Law saith, it saith to them who are under the Law, that every mouth may be stopped, and ALL THE WORLD MAY BECOME GUILTY BEFORE GOD."*

Similarly in 5:20—

> *"The Law entered THAT THE OFFENCE MIGHT ABOUND."*

Sin is a disease. We have, as Paul says in 7:23—

> *"The law of sin in our members, warring against the law of our mind."*

Offences, transgressions, are the symptoms of that disease. The Law of Moses was given so that the symptoms would become obvious and identifiable, so that man may recognize his diseased condition, and seek unto the Great Physician.

We are not under the Law of Moses, but still it serves the same purpose for us as for them. We know we could not perfectly keep that holy Law any more than they could. There were many great and godly men of the Jewish race, but none of them—except Jesus himself—could obey that Law of God to perfection. *This* is the message of Paul to the Jews in chapter 2—

> *"Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself, for thou that judgest doest the same things"* (2:1).

Here is where we are all in danger. It is so easy for us to say, and even more easy to think complacently within ourselves—

> *"WE are the chosen people of God: all the outside world are sinners."*

We know the latter part is true, and hopefully the former part is true, but the attitude is wrong: it is the old Jewish blindness. We are *all* sinners, and we shall *perish as sinners* if we judge others rather than ourselves.

There are certain rigid divine laws of separation from the world and from error. There are certain rigid laws of fellowship. In faithfulness they must be obeyed. They are God's laws. We

did not make them; we are under them. And in obeying these fellowship laws, there must be a discerning of facts, as to who has the Gospel of Truth, and who are faithful to it.

But it is especially important at such times to make sure that our attitude is in harmony with Paul's warning here; and that we are always vividly conscious that at our very best and even when we are trying our hardest, we still have that ever-present law of sin in our members, and never fully do what we should, and are always ourselves in need of the mercy of God. It is when we are judging others that we must most carefully and searchingly judge ourselves—as to our attitude, our motive, our spirit, our consistency, and our constant remembrance of our own inherent sinfulness and need for mercy.

And it is at this solemn time especially, as we partake of these memorials of the body and blood of him who lovingly gave his life on our account, that we must examine *ourselves*—

> *"Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat . . ."*

The flesh is evil; the heart is deceitful. But the love of God is infinitely stronger than either, and it CAN purify and transform us in holiness by the Word. In the end, a vast, glorious, rejoicing multitude *will* have overcome the flesh. Every one of us *can* be among them—but only if we resolutely cast aside *everything* in our lives that does not contribute to this one purpose—

> *"Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside EVERY WEIGHT, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."*

Shall a Child Be Born?

"And he said, Where is the lamb? And Abraham said, My son, God will provide Himself a lamb" (Gen. 22:8).

At the command of God, Abraham severed all his connections with his home and his native land, and went forth in simple faith, *"not knowing whither he went."*

Abraham's outstanding characteristic was *faith.* He is presented to us as the pre-eminent example in this respect—*"The Father of the Faithful."* Faith that hesitated at nothing and rose triumphant above every obstacle and natural sentiment and desire.

It is one thing to be so vividly convinced of God's closeness and reality as to be able to defy universal opinion and—dropping everything—to follow an unseen Voice through strange, wild lands for 1,000 miles with no idea of the destination or perils of the way.

It is an even far greater thing to wait more than twenty-five years in that alien land for even the first beginnings of the fulfillment of the promise that had drawn him forth. What were Abraham's thoughts as year after year rolled by, each one making the realization of the promise appear even less possible? He waited in faith.

Then, finally, when he was ninety-nine, God appeared to him again and said the promise of a seed was about to be fulfilled, (Gen. 17:16). Genesis 17:17-18—

> *"Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is one hundred years old? And shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear? And Abraham said unto God, O that Ishmael might live before Thee!"*

Does this mean that Abraham's faith wavered? Paul says of this very occasion—

> *"And being NOT WEAK IN FAITH, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb. He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was STRONG IN FAITH, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that what He had promised, He was also able to perform"* (Rom. 4:18-21).

Why then, after God has just specifically promised a son to Sarah, did Abraham laugh, and then say,

"Shall a son be born to him that is an hundred years old? . . . O that Ishmael might live before Thee!"

The Scriptures show us the *conflict* of Abraham's faith—the tremendous strain that was continually placed upon it—and the way in which it rose above every trial. Not without stumblings, but with constant renewal. *God* can distinguish between failure, and the working out of an inner struggle—although often *man* cannot. Abraham's faith did not operate effortlessly or automatically. He did not wait with serene and placid unconcern. He had to extend every effort to steel his faith against the natural tendencies of doubt and discouragement, and impatience and weariness of waiting.

Faith had already carried him far, but still it was an effort of the Spirit against the flesh. How much finer and more inspiring Abraham's faith appears when we see its inner struggle! How much closer we feel to him!

The example of Abraham would be valueless to us if his faith were something that took over mechanically like an automatic pilot and guided him without effort. It was something that he himself had to put to use by diligent application and prayerful effort. And he did, and won out, and so became the father of all who follow in his steps.

"Abraham laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old?"

That was the immediate, natural reaction, always present with him, which he fought and subdued for many long tedious years of disappointment and delay. *"Hoping against hope,"* Paul tells us. Doggedly shutting his eyes to the things that seemed to cry out that his faith was foolishness, and keeping the vision of the promise before him.

"He considered not his own body now dead, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb."

"He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief."

His faith battled on, girding itself resolutely against the ceaseless assaults of doubt and delay.

And finally the promised son was born. How infinitely precious the seed would be, after such a long and trying period of waiting! Abraham and Sarah were now old. All the hope of the promise for which they had waited for a quarter of a century was centered in the boy Isaac as he grew to manhood.

But still God had not finished the trial and perfecting of Abraham's faith. The greatest test was yet to come, when it seemed that all testing must now surely be over—

"And God said to Abraham, 'Take now thy son, thine ONLY son Isaac, WHOM THOU LOVEST, and get thee unto the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt offering."

But that was much later. First we must consider the events that intervened.

Besides the long years of waiting, Abraham had been subject to many trials, often in jeopardy of his life. His life's course was one of insecurity and instability—a continual wandering and waiting among alien perils. He left a comfortable, settled civilization in Chaldea and spent his life as a pilgrim—

"Dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob."

One hundred years in a tent—in summer's heat and winter's cold—just as a symbol of obedience and faith. *"The father of the faithful."* It was not what he was used to for the first seventy years of his life. Excavations in Ur reveal that he had left behind him houses as substantial and comfortable as ours, and a high degree of civilization.

Leaving his country and kindred at God's first call, and finally reaching the promised land, he had immediately encountered famine, and faced the prospect of starvation (Gen. 12:10). In search of food, he left the land and went to Egypt. Should he have gone to Egypt or not? It is hard to say. Perhaps it was a well-meaning error of judgment, a misguided human effort to help along the Divine Plan, like the later attempt to provide a seed through Hagar. Perhaps, having been instructed by God to go to Canaan he should have stayed there until further directed, relying on God to provide. Later, in identical circumstances of famine (Gen. 26:2), Isaac is specifically warned not to go to Egypt, but to stay in God's land and trust to His care.

Looking back, we can see the spiritual significance in these instances, and it appears that Abraham's lessons and experiences are intended as a guide and warning to us. At any rate, he soon found that Egypt held greater perils than famine, and only the intervention of God averted a catastrophe (Gen. 12:15-20).

Being released and sent forth again by the king of Egypt, he returned to Canaan (Gen. 13). There the heavy burden of his useless possessions imposed another trial upon him. He was separated from Lot, his only kinsman in the land, because their wealth prevented them from living together in peace; what a tragedy! And with a heavy heart he sees Lot go off to

settle amid the allurements of corruption. Lot abandons the faithful tabernacle, pilgrim living, and goes back to the comforts of a settled existence and city ways, little suspecting what lies in store.

Abraham is next confronted (Gen. 14) with the capture of Lot by Chedorlaomer. With tremendous faith and courage he goes forth with a little band against great odds, and God enables him to rescue Lot and all who had been taken away and the strange and wonderful incident of Melchizedek occurs.

Then (Gen. 16) came the unhappy case of Hagar—*human device and reasoning trying in its anxious weakness to augment and hasten the eternal workings of God.* Was it wrong? It was limited judgment, and a deeper insight could have shown Abraham that it was out of harmony with the principles of God's purpose. Here again, Abraham, with sincere zeal and good intentions, *went beyond his instructions*, and the results added to his trials.

It was not Abraham's idea, but Sarah's. Abraham hearkened to her pleading, as Adam had to Eve, but soon Sarah herself saw that in her shortsighted anxiety, she had played into the hands of her maidservant, who was quick to seize the advantage and who now despised her. And Sarah in her bitterness reproached Abraham for having done what she herself had initiated and urged.

And there is a measure of justice in Sarah's reproach, for Abraham's responsibility was greater, and he should have guided her, rather than allow himself to be misguided by her. Henceforth there is constant friction. Hagar is finally removed much later, but first for nearly twenty years Abraham and Sarah must suffer this added burden and disharmony.

Abraham's next trial is the misfortune that falls upon Lot in the destruction of Sodom (Gen. 18 and 19). We are told that Lot was righteous, and that his soul was vexed at the corrupt practices that surrounded him in Sodom (2 Pet. 2:8).

But he stayed there. Even when the angels urged him, with warning of imminent destruction, it is said "he lingered," until the angels seized him by the hand and brought him out forcibly. Why did he linger, though the whole community vexed him daily with its godlessness?

Because he had given his daughters unto the sons of the heathen. He was bound to Sodom by the sense of a dreadful responsibility. The angels had said—

"Hast thou here any besides? son-in-law, and thy sons, and thy daughters—BRING THEM OUT OF THIS PLACE."

Lot did his best to warn them, but it was too late. He could make no impression. They thought he was mad. The damage had been done. We are told when he *first went there* the place was notorious for wickedness against God, but Lot saw that the land was fertile and prosperous, and he was carried away, to his own loss and sorrow.

Outside the city, a little further light is thrown on Lot's circumstances. His wife's character and leanings are revealed, and we understand better what happened to his family. We are not told where Lot's wife came from. It seems almost certain that she was a Canaanite, as she is not mentioned in the specific list that left Ur of the Chaldees, nor those that later left Haran. Nor is she ever mentioned previous to Lot's going to Sodom. He could have been at Sodom nearly twenty-five years. It would seem most likely then, both from this and from her conduct, that she was a native of Sodom. Jesus said, *"Remember Lot's wife"*; and surely there is much we can profitably remember about her.

The angel said, *"Escape to the mountain."* Lot replied, *"Not so, my lord, let me flee to this little city that is near."* Again we wonder, "Why?" Why presume to know better than God? Why not obey without question and leave it all to God? Why did he ask, and why was he permitted later to find his own mistake and belatedly follow the original instruction?

This city was slated for destruction with the rest, but Lot's request interfered with the full carrying out of the divine purpose. The reason Lot gives is fear of the mountains. And yet he was right in the midst of such a signal demonstration of God's power and care for him! Soon after, he comes to fear the inhabitants of Zoar more than the mountains, and goes on to the latter.

And so ends the story of Lot—in distress and humiliation and poverty—everything lost.

Abraham's next trial (Gen. 20) is a repetition in the land of the Philistines of the circumstances that happened in Egypt. Once again he attempts to ensure his own safety by deception regarding his relation to Sarah; once again he creates for himself and others much greater danger than that he sought to avoid; and *once again he is humiliatingly rebuked by the foreigner he has deceived.*

It is not our position to judge Abraham. His place in God's purpose is a fixed and glorious one. He is one of the few great men of the race, towering far above us. *But it IS our duty to be guided and warned by his mistakes, and their consequences.* Abraham's conduct did not reflect glory to God in this matter.

With the best of intentions, in the exercise of his own judgment, Abraham followed a course of apparently harmless deception which instead of helping him, brought him and Sarah into very serious complications. "*She is my sister.*" It was technically true, but it was said to create a false impression.

The Scriptures exalt Truth very highly. Like purity and holiness, it is a fundamental characteristic of eternity and incorruptibility. Truth, and Truth alone, is enduring and substantial. All deception contains the seeds of corruption and decay, however well-meaning its purpose and harmless its intentions.

It was not necessary for Abraham to descend to deception. God had proclaimed himself Abraham's "*Shield and exceeding great Reward*" (Gen. 15). Why need he cheapen himself with subterfuge?

But is it possible that the course Abraham followed was perfectly acceptable with God, and in harmony with God's eternal standards. It does not seem so, in light of the consequences both times. Abraham is rebuked and humiliated. It would set too low a value on dignity and integrity. It does not harmonize with utter and complete "*Truth in the inward parts*" which is the only satisfactory ideal (Psa. 51:6).

Truth must be absolute to have any value. Permit the smallest amount of falsehood to mingle with Truth, and Truth begins immediately to take the shape of mere expediency, and the color of hypocrisy. We cannot believe that Abraham's conduct in these instances represents the ideal we are striving toward.

But it will be said that God Himself makes use of deception. Many instances will come to mind, such as when He causes armies to flee at the noise of an imaginary enemy (2 Kgs. 7:6). Even further, God has instructed man in the use of deception. The stratagem whereby the city of Ai was taken by ambush was at the direct command of God (Josh. 8:2). Abraham very likely used a similar device in defeating Chedorlaomer and rescuing Lot. Deception is one of the basic, universally recognized first principles of warfare, and God has in the past legitimized war.

Does this destroy our viewpoint? Must we then be content with something less than pure truth and perfection in our ideals? Still we hear the voice of the Psalmist, "*Thou desirest Truth in the inward parts*" . . . "*Blessed is he that speaketh the Truth in his heart.*" God Himself can with complete propriety use deception if it suits His all wise purpose. He is over and above all. He knows and controls all. Therefore, there is no injustice or incongruity in His using deception *as a judicial measure.* He would never deceive except to punish.

He creates evil, and uses it, yet evil is not holy, or pure, or eternal, and it is *forbidden to His children,* except at His direct instruction. We are told (2 Thess. 2:10-12) that because men "*receive not the love of Truth*" God sends them "*strong delusion*" and causes them to "*believe a lie.*" That is deception—judicial deception, and a fitting retribution for rejecting the love of Truth.

Deception is part of the same fabric as evil and war, and is legitimate only in circumstances where they are legitimate. It has no place in the daily lives and contacts of those who are striving to conform themselves to eternal things, and to manifest God to man. It had no place here—in the relationship between Abraham and Abimelech.

It may be said that as it was not wrong for Abraham to use war, it was also not wrong for him to use deception. But this does not follow. David's charge against Joab was that he deceitfully shed the blood of war in peace (1 Kgs. 2:5). Abraham, using deception, set in motion forces that well nigh brought about the death of many (naturally speaking) innocent people.

And more important than his relations with Abimelech were his relations with Sarah. All the dignity and beauty of marriage depends upon its conformity with the great antitype Christ and the Ecclesia. Could Christ, to avoid persecution, conceal his relationship to the Ecclesia, or she hers to him? Many Christians lost their lives because they would not permit the slightest obscuring of this relationship. We remember Daniel and his fearlessly-opened window that brought him to the lions' den (Dan. 6:10). It is an inspiring testimony for all time.

The false church, on the other hand, not perceiving the deep significance of its bonds and communion with Christ, or treating them lightly, said, "He is only my brother, I am still free to marry the king of Egypt for present advantage," so they

sought the world's companionship and citizenship, and persecution ceased.

Abraham's next recorded trial (Gen. 21) arose from an old, festering unhealed sore. The long-standing friction over Hagar—bitter fruit of misguided zeal—came to a crisis. Sarah said, (Gen. 21:10)—

> *"Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac."*
>
> *"And the thing was grievous in Abraham's sight because of his son Ishmael."*

Why could they not live together in peace? Because peace can only be built on one foundation—*Divine truth.*

Was Sarah right or wrong in her demand? We know that Hagar had no proper place in the inner circle of that household. She was an Egyptian and a bondwoman. This was a chosen family, through whom God was not only commencing to work out a great plan, but was portraying in allegory the whole cycle of that plan—*the bond and the free—the Flesh and the Spirit.*

And Hagar had commenced the enmity by openly despising Sarah. Hagar and Ishmael showed cruel enmity against Sarah and her son, the true seed. They were not a good element in the household. Paul says Ishmael persecuted Isaac. He that was after the flesh persecuted him that was after the spirit.

It was necessary that Hagar and Ishmael should go. The whole affair had been a sad error. God instructs Abraham to do as Sarah desires. We must conclude that in principle Sarah was correct, and that this was the only possible solution. Sarah had suffered much from the matter, although it is true the original error was hers.

It is the handling of the case that may seem unnecessarily hard. It appears that Hagar is divorced and thrust out to wander in the wilderness with a small child, and with scanty provisions.

But is this the correct picture? In the first place, God Himself expressly took over and guaranteed the care of Ishmael. He told Abraham to send him away, and promised that He would make a great nation of him. And Ishmael was not, as it might appear, a small helpless child, but was about seventeen years old.

And there is no reason to suppose that Hagar did not have a definite destination and was not properly supplied to reach

there. We can take it as a practical certainty that Abraham would make such provision, not only from his own general nature, but from his particular feeling for his son. Every impulse of Abraham under the circumstances would be to reduce the hardship attendant upon this final parting. But in God's purpose, Hagar lost her way, that certain things might be revealed to her.

And so finally, after many trials, the long-promised seed has come, the unfortunate and long-suffered barrier of Hagar between Abraham and Sarah has been removed, and it begins to appear that the long testing and development of Abraham's faith and character is coming to an end.

And then once more (Gen. 22), God appears to Abraham, and without any explanation commands him to offer Isaac as a burnt offering. Abraham's reaction, as far as it is given, is perfect—and the record has certainly not spared him previously. There is not the slightest hint of reluctancy, doubt, or hesitation, and his words as he goes forward to the offering are full of assurance and faith—*"God will provide."* What wonderful, confident words! "GOD WILL PROVIDE!"

Perhaps Abraham had prayed for one final opportunity to show that now at last his faith was full and complete. There is no evidence of any conflict of desires—just supreme understanding and trust. Nothing in Abraham's demeanor betrayed to Isaac that ought was amiss, and Abraham's evident peace and confidence was so great that Isaac willingly submitted to his own part.

Paul says that Abraham knew that God had promised that the seed should come through Isaac, and he accounted that God was able to raise Isaac up, even from the dead (Heb. 11:19). To Abraham the command held no repulsiveness or terror—his confidence in God's love and power blotted all that out.

What a victory for Abraham's faith. All his past struggles are overshadowed by this final triumph, for which the long development had prepared him. All his waiting and steadfastness is justified. Now he was at peace with God and with himself. The promise was once more renewed (Gen. 22:16), and God tried him no more.

This is the end of Abraham's recorded pilgrimage. From this point the story is concerned with Isaac. Abraham lives nearly another forty years, but very little more is recorded concerning him. The record drops him out and moves on. He has played his part through to ultimate success and peace. In this last

chapter of his allegorical life, he typically enacts the salvation of the world—the loving Father and the obedient sacrificed Son. How much of its significance he was privileged to discern we know not, but we feel that, like Moses, he was in this scene on Moriah, taken up and given a broad, distant view of the Promised Land in its final glory. *"He saw Christ's day, and was glad."*

Not Ashamed to Be Called Their God

LIGHT AND SHADE IN THE LIFE OF JACOB

Genesis chapters 34 and 35 cover a portion of the life of Jacob, following his meeting with Esau when he returned to the land with his family.

First is the incident of Dinah and Shechem. Then the command to go to Bethel. He puts away the strange gods of his household, goes to Bethel, and builds an altar there; God appears to him and renews the covenant. He journeys on, and Rachel dies while giving birth to Benjamin. Reuben defiles Jacob's concubine Bilhah. Finally he reaches Isaac, his father, at Hebron. And lastly, Isaac dies and Jacob and Esau bury him.

The account, on the surface, is in the main sordid, sad, and purposeless—just a common record of human weakness, evil, and misfortune. But these things are all recorded for a purpose. They all form part of those things which, says Paul, were "written for our admonition." Although the surface picture is one of the natural, and apparently purposeless, heaving of troubled waters, yet *beneath* it there is a strong current of divine direction and control.

Jacob is working out his salvation, and learning obedience by the things which he suffers. The record is a strange mixture of the human and the divine. Between the sordid episodes of Dinah and Reuben we find the glorious events of Bethel.

There is very little recorded of happiness or peace in the lives of the patriarchs. It is mostly trouble, and friction, and danger, and sorrow, and the endless, restless journeying onward. In Abraham's picture there was the conflict of Sarah and Hagar, Isaac and Ishmael. In Isaac's that between Esau and Jacob. And Jacob's family was the scene of continual jealousy and strife.

To the patriarchs, as they struggled through their lives, the broad picture was not as clear as it is to us, for we can look back from the vantage point of a long historical fulfillment. So we find that Abraham pleaded that Ishmael might be accepted as the seed through which the Redeemer should come. And Isaac loved Esau, and sought to transmit the great treasure of the divine blessing through him.

We may wonder at this, but (though God, Who sees the end from the beginning, made choice of Jacob before their birth) there may have been aspects of Jacob's natural character that

needed beautifying through trial, and of Esau's that were robust and appealing.

It takes suffering and adversity to bring out character. We know—because we have the completed record of their lives, and the verdict of the Spirit—that Jacob was a *man of faith*, and Esau a *profane person*. But a man of faith may have much to learn about love and truth and kindliness and largeness of heart. Jacob, who first comes to our notice involved in a deception finds that deception stalks him throughout his life. His deception doubtless was well-meaning, and was even rooted in a misapplication of his faith, but it is a strange irony that, as he used the skin of a kid of the goats to deceive *his* father, so he was deceived in a much more cruel way by his own sons with the blood of a kid of the goats.

The first chapter (34) is entirely about the affair of Dinah and Shechem. It all began when, as we read in verse 1—

"Dinah went out to see the daughters of the land."

We wonder why the events of this chapter should happen—and why they were recorded. When we look at the results, it would seem that the overall purpose in the divine plan was the breaking up of the association that was forming between the family of Jacob and these Canaanites.

Both Abraham and Isaac had shown great anxiety that the holy seed should not be joined in marriage with the people of the land. We wonder, therefore, why Jacob should buy land and plan to settle down at the gate of a Canaanite city. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were, by divine decree, strangers and pilgrims. Integration with the people of the land was the one thing above all others that must be avoided.

As we look over the lives of Abraham and Isaac, we see how events conspired to keep them separate and ever moving. Even the incident of representing their wives as sisters had, in each case, the result of their being sent out from among the people with whom they were dwelling.

Beside keeping separate, one other thing was very important. Until the foreordained time came for God to take them to Egypt (as foreshadowed to Abraham) they had to stay *in* the land—but as *pilgrims*, not as settlers. We remember Abraham went into Egypt because of the famine, but circumstances soon caused his return. When a similar famine came in the days of Isaac, God very significantly told him NOT to go to Egypt, promising to care for him in the land.

When Abraham sent back to Haran for a wife for Isaac, his most pressing instruction to his servant was that he should not—under any circumstances—ever take Isaac back to Haran. If the woman would not come to the promised land, the marriage would not be consummated. (There is a type in this).

But arising out of the complications and frictions of the deception about the blessing, Isaac—influenced by Rebekah—sent Jacob back to Haran, out of the promised land where they had been commanded to dwell. Thus, one misstep led to another, and Jacob became so enmeshed and involved at Haran that it took twenty years of hardship and oppression to drive him back to the land again.

And now he is back, he settles down at the gate of the city of Shechem. He seems to forget for the time that the divine choice of his family was founded on complete separation from the people of the world. God had said to Abraham—

"Get thee OUT . . . and I will bless thee."

Just as He declares to us through the apostle Paul—

"Come ye OUT . . . and I will be your Father."

See how Lot made the sad mistake of getting involved in the corrupt city life of the heathen. The plain of the Jordan was prosperous and populous—exciting and inviting—so Lot "pitched his tent toward Sodom," just exactly as Jacob pitched his tent before Shechem—just as close as he could get without going in.

When we think of this matter of cities, we are reminded of the Rechabites, whose father commanded them not to drink wine, build houses, sow seed, nor plant vineyards,—but to dwell all their days in tents. Not that there was anything wrong in these things as such, but they were to remain perpetually pilgrims, and be constantly reminded of their difference and separation from the surrounding people and their evil ways.

There is much of deep significance in these Rechabites. In the midst of general corruption, Jeremiah found that they had remained true to their covenant of separation, and because of this God pronounced a solemn blessing on their family for ever.

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were divinely appointed to possess none of the land—to have *no settled life.* This was to be a big point for the instruction of future generations—keeping the issues very clear concerning the time and condition of the fulfillment of the covenant. And is it no more than a meaningless coincidence that the true Heir, the long-awaited Seed, spent his life as a pilgrim on the roads of this same land—

his nonpossession of it so complete that he had nowhere to lay his head, and must be buried in another's sepulchre?

"Lot pitched his tent *toward* Sodom." The next thing we hear about him he is right *inside.* True, he vexes his righteous soul from day to day because of the city's corruption and wickedness—but he still *stays* there. Why? Apparently because he has become involved and cannot leave. It is always much easier to get in than to get out.

The whole picture points to the conclusion that he had taken a wife from there—a wife whose heart remained in Sodom right to the end. And his children married there. When he tried to persuade them to leave the doomed city, his sons-in-law laughed him to scorn. What an unhappy position he had gotten himself into! The angels of God tugging at him from one side, and his family ties all pulling in the opposite way!

So Jacob *bought some land,* and pitched his tent at the gate of Shechem, apparently with a view to permanency. As was to be expected in the circumstances, his daughter Dinah mingles with the daughters of the land. Something is necessary to bring things to a head, and to put the chosen family back on its divinely appointed course of separation and pilgrimage. And we find that something—the Dinah-Shechem affair—DOES occur that has the effect of completely isolating Jacob from the Canaanites. Summing it up at the end of the chapter, Jacob says—

> *"Ye have troubled me to make me to stink among the inhabitants of the land."*

We are not to assume, because God used this incident, that He approved the treacherous actions of Levi and Simeon. Speaking prophetically by the Spirit at the end of his life, Jacob says—

> *"Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will scatter them in Israel."*

Their killing of the prince Shechem—"more honorable than all his father's house"—is used as a type of their crucifixion of the Prince of Life—"In their anger they slew a man."

Jacob is very distressed—fearful that all the inhabitants of the land will gather together against him. At this point God again openly intervenes in his life, and says to him—

> *"Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell THERE, and there make an altar unto God Who appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from Esau."*

This was just what Jacob needed, and at the right time. His comfortable settling down at Shechem has been violently broken up, and he is again fleeing in fear.

First God says: "Go and dwell at Bethel." This command brings into sharp contrast the associations of Bethel with those of Shechem where Jacob had *planned* to dwell. Bethel means "House of God." It was sanctified by the vision of the ladder, the pillar Jacob had set up, and the divine covenant.

Next, the command to build an altar there focuses his mind on God's great purpose through his family; it gives him strength and encouragement and resolve.

And finally, being reminded of God's former assuring appearance to him when he was fleeing from danger just as he is now—would add to his renewed courage. So a new and brighter chapter opens. We turn from the sordid things of men to the glorious things of God.

> *"Then said Jacob unto his household, Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments"* (35:2)

Here is a new atmosphere. Jacob is reawakening. Here again we have the Jacob who wrestled all the night with the angel, and who was given the noble title of Israel—*"Prince with God."*

So (v. 4) they gave Jacob all the strange gods that were among them. It was a general reformation of his household, in preparation for his communion with God at Bethel. We may wonder how it could be that there *were* strange gods in the possession of his household, but in the type of community over which Jacob presided, and in which (judging by his sons) he was practically the only one with a living comprehension of the true God, such practices could very easily develop, unless Jacob constantly rooted them out.

In a somewhat different sense, we would find a similar condition in the modern communities of the called-out family of Israel, for "All are not Israel who are of Israel." It behoves us all, then, like Jacob, to gather up all the strange gods and all the earrings—all the flashy and fleshy baubles—and bury them under the oak which is by Shechem; leave them behind at forsaken and ill-remembered Shechem where they belong. It is surely significant that Joshua used these *same words* to Israel, in the *same place.* In Joshua 24:23-26, we find him saying—

> *"Now, therefore, put away the strange gods which are among you. And the people said, 'We will serve the*

Lord.' And Joshua made a covenant with the people that day in Shechem, and wrote these words in the book of the law of God, and took a great stone and set it up there under an oak."

It was on this memorable occasion that Joshua declared—

"Choose ye this day whom ye will serve! As for me and my house, WE WILL SERVE THE LORD!"

Arriving at Bethel, Jacob built the altar as commanded, and God again appeared to him, giving him assurance of the glorious promises concerning his name, his seed, and his inheritance of the land.

But the dark side of the picture turns toward us again in the next few verses. Dark, and yet strangely beautiful even in its sadness. Paul, writing to the Galatians, hinges a doctrinal argument on the figurative meaning of the relationship between Sarah and Hagar. He says—

"These are the two covenants: Hagar is Mt. Sinai—in bondage with her children."

When we study the relationship of Leah and Rachel, we have the same picture: Rachel the old Mosaic economy—Leah the new; Rachel the flesh—Leah the spirit. By the decision of her father, Leah was the first and the true wife. Paul carefully points out how the Law of Moses (Rachel), to which the natural Jew leaned with such affection, was secondary to, and later than, the original Abrahamic covenant of the Christ-seed.

Leah was *"tender-eyed"*—the word means soft and gentle—but Rachel was beautiful. Jacob preferred Rachel because of outward appearances, just as the Jew loved the outward forms of the Law, but God—who looks upon the heart—ordained that both the priesthood and the throne should come through the line of the unwanted Leah.

But still Rachel has her appointed part to play. As the figure of natural Israel, it is she who gives birth to Joseph, the favorite and faithful son of his father, and the most striking type in all Scripture of the rejected Savior.

And now Rachel dies. We remember that as they fled from Laban, Rachel clung to her father's idols. When Laban pursued Jacob and charged him with this theft, Jacob says—

"With whomsoever thou findest thy gods, let him not live!"

They were not discovered, for Rachel concealed them by a deception. In her clinging to these gods of her idolatrous ancestors we can see the type of Israel's self-destructive course all down through their history.

"Whoever is found with them, let him not live." So as they journey on again from Bethel, the covenant-sanctified House of God, Rachel dies just a little way before they reach Bethlehem. *She did not quite reach Bethlehem.* She was buried and left behind while Jacob and Leah went on to finish the journey together.

The significance of the introduction of Bethlehem into the picture at this point surely cannot be missed! Leah, we later learn, was buried with the patriarchs in the family burying-place of Abraham, the cave of Machpeleh, but Rachel is buried by the wayside on the journey.

She died in giving birth to Israel's last son. As she died, she named him Ben-oni—"son of my sorrow"; but his father called him Benjamin—"son of my right hand." How clearly we see Israel in this allegory! The nation of Israel, as constituted under the old covenant, died in giving birth to Israel's last great son—the Messiah. We recall how Matthew quotes Jeremiah's reference to Rachel weeping for her children, and applies it to the nation at this very time and occasion.

The nation called this child Ben-oni—*son of my sorrow.* Isaiah 53 clearly gives their view of him—

> *"Despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrow . . . we esteemed him not."*

He was "son of their sorrow," too, in that—even while they esteemed him smitten of God—he "bore their grief and carried their sorrows." They called him son of their sorrow also in their rejection and abuse of him. But his father called him Benjamin—*son of my right hand.* David speaks of him (Psa. 80:17), as—

> *"The man of God's right hand; the son of man whom God made strong for Himself."*

This son of God's right hand has now, says Paul,

> *"Sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high."*

After Rachel was buried, Jacob journeyed on. The next event (v. 22) is the relation of Reuben with Bilhah, his father's concubine. The event is passed over very briefly here, without comment, but it had very far-reaching consequences. When Jacob was about to die, he blessed his sons, and spoke prophetically of the later history of their families. Beginning with Reuben, he said (Gen. 49:3-4)—

> *"Reuben, thou art my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power."*

That is what *might have been*, but he continues—

"Thou shalt NOT excel (that is, have the excellency), *because thou wentest up to thy father's bed."*

And so in 1st Chronicles 5:1 we read that because of this act, the birthright and pre-eminence was taken from the house of Reuben and given to the sons of Joseph. Things may often appear to be passed over without notice at the time, but God does not forget. Let us take this lesson to heart. Let us be impressed by the fact that any action of ours may have great and lasting consequences of good or evil. The Bible contains many such incidents—where the whole course of history and people's destinies are affected by a seemingly small and passed-over act.

"And Jacob came unto Isaac his father" (v. 27).

No mention is made of Rebekah. It would appear from this that she had died sometime during the long years since Jacob had fled from home in fear of Esau. Rebekah had said—

"Go to Laban, and tarry with him a few days."

It does not appear that she ever saw Jacob again. What a long train of events developed from the spur-of-the-moment deception concerning the blessing!

The final event of the chapter is the death and burial of Isaac, 180 years old. We know very little about those 180 years. It was not intended that we should know. Just a few incidents are picked out and recorded for a purpose. But we do know that those 180 years were spent in patient and faithful watching.

"By faith (says the apostle) *they sojourned in the land of promise, looking for a city which hath foundations—whose Builder and Maker is God."*

It was not God's intention that they should be mixed with the cities of men, but that they should dwell all their lives in tabernacles—tents—disdaining the comforts and pleasure of the world, and thereby confessing their faith that they were strangers and pilgrims in the earth, awaiting their glorious destiny.

"Wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He hath prepared for them a city."

"Not ashamed to be called their God!" Let us so frame our lives that God will not be ashamed to be called *our* God, and that we, too, may be among the few taken from among men to enter that eternal city!

The Serpent and the Rod

The following thoughts concern the incidents surrounding the one recorded failure of one of the greatest of the few great men that have ever lived. The background of the story begins in Exodus 3—the account of a strange event of tremendous significance in the development of the eternal purpose of God.

As the account begins, we find Moses tending sheep—an occupation in which he has spent forty years of his life; surely one of the humblest and simplest occupations possible, but they were not wasted years for Moses, though they would appear so in the eyes of the ambitious of the world.

At the end of this forty years of patient preparation, God appeared to Moses in the sign of the burning, but unconsumed, bush. The original means "thorn-bush."

Remembering Jothan's parable about the fruit trees and the bramble (Jdg. 9), Jehoash's taunt about the cedar and the thistle (2 Kgs. 14:9), Isaiah's and Ezekiel's use of the tall cedars as mighty nations, the great, wide-spreading Babylonian tree that reached to heaven (Dan. 4), and Jesus' parable of the Kingdom as a minute grain of mustard seed that finally filled the earth—in the light of these symbols, and others, how fitting is this fire-swept but never destroyed thorn-bush as a manifestation of God's purpose in and through Israel.

As shown on Roman coins, the emperors of Rome—one of the mightiest tree-kingdoms—wore a laurel wreath as a badge of their authority, but the King of the thorn-bush kingdom wore a crown of thorns.

In this manifestation to Moses, God revealed the eternal, memorial, covenant Name—I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE—the multitudinous purpose.

And this solemn occasion—the call of Moses, after forty years probation, to lead and bring to birth the nation of God—one of the key points in the Plan of the Ages—is marked by three signs: the serpent and the rod, the leprous and cleansed hand, and the poured-out water becoming blood, symbols of deep significance.

* * *

Moving forward another forty years, we reach the scene depicted in the 20th of Numbers. This chapter opens at the beginning of the fortieth year of Israel's wanderings.

Very little is recorded of the terrible forty years—just glimpses of the beginning and the ending—but it is well to ponder upon this weary period. Forty long, monotonous years in a hot, barren, dusty, comfortless wilderness—all the adults under the shadow of the sentence of death, waiting their turn to die.

Think of living under such conditions of hardship, with no hope of any release but death. The Scriptures speak of it as a waste, howling wilderness, a place of withering drought, and infested with fiery serpents and scorpions.

What did they do during those long years of endless waiting? In those forty years they moved their camp forty-two times, and they never knew—from one day to the next—when the next move would be.

Why were these people in this position? God had chosen and called them, brought them close to Himself and shown them marvelous things—but they had remained earthy and had failed to rise to the call. So a whole generation were cast aside to perish in these miserable surroundings.

And now the last year begins. The promised land of plenty, with its fruitful fields and green valleys and pleasant, settled houses, is within sight. They have arrived at Kadesh, south of the Dead Sea and on the west border of the land of Edom. *(Kadesh means holiness. In the antitype it is the point reached at the end of the wilderness journey, before entering the Promised Land.)*

The first event at Kadesh is the death and burial of Miriam. What a long, eventful time it had been—120 years—since we saw Miriam as a little girl courageously facing the majesty of the Princess of Egypt on behalf of her baby brother!

And now Miriam was gone. She, too, had had a great moment of failure and shame, when she questioned the supremacy of Moses and suffered the humiliation and affliction of leprosy, but this would now only be a regretted incident in their long period of working together.

* * *

> *"And there was no water for the congregation: and they gathered themselves together against Moses and Aaron"* (v. 2).

The people on one side—Moses and Aaron on the other. The same old picture! Forty years had taught them nothing of faith in God or affection and trust for their leaders.

> *"And the people chode with Moses, saying, Would God that we had died when our brethren died before the Lord!"* (v. 3).

From time to time during the forty years, many had been smitten by God—as concerning the golden calf, the report of the spies, the lust for meat, the rebellion of Korah—and now in their faithless despair they wished they were among those whom God had destroyed.

We can, and must, sympathize with the bitterness of their lot, but how displeasing would their complaining be to God, and how grieving it would be to Moses who had given his life to teach and to care for and to entreat for them! Human nature is an evil, sinful, ungrateful thing.

Moses and Aaron went to the Tabernacle and fell on their faces before the Lord. They were two old men against an ignorant and enraged rabble, but their strength was in God.

"AND THE GLORY OF THE LORD APPEARED UNTO THEM."

What a wonderful thing! *"The glory of the Lord appeared unto them."* If Moses had stopped to think, this could have settled and quieted his overwrought emotions, and brought a great peace and calm that no outward provocation could disturb.

As we consider these instances of open divine manifestation, we may feel that if only the glory of the Lord would appear to us, we could cheerfully and fearlessly face anything! But—does not the glory of God appear to us—*if we will let it?*

Does it not appear in all His wonderful works around us in the ever-present marvels and beauties of His holy Word; in the terrible but inspiring accuracy of the working out of His purpose with the seething nations in these closing Gentile days, and above all in the promise that if we truly seek Him, He will come and make His abode with us? *It is only our fleshly heedlessness that prevents our feeling the power of the presence of that glory.*

The brotherhood today is being shaken to its foundations, and long-accepted standards of truth and holiness are being cast aside, but good will come of it if we hold fast and are not swept backwards by the general tide. Let us pause and step aside and take time to let the glory of God appear unto us and envelop our lives, and all else will fade into insignificance, and we shall have calm and peace.

* * *

"And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Take the Rod" (v. 7).

"THE Rod." Clearly some particular rod is meant. What rod?

"And Moses took the Rod from before the Lord" (v. 9).

Arising out of Korah's rebellion, some time before this, God had confirmed the authority of Moses and Aaron by the token of the blossomed rod. And God had said (17:10)—

"Bring Aaron's Rod before the Testimony, to be kept for a token against the rebels."

Paul tells us (Heb. 9:4) that this rod was kept inside the very Ark of the Covenant itself. This was the most sacred place possible, teaching us the importance of the significance of this Rod.

So the Rod Moses was to take was Aaron's Rod that budded. Now let us trace this Rod back a little further, and we shall find that it has an interesting history. We shall find that *"Aaron's"* Rod is the same as *"Moses' "* Rod.

Turning back to Exodus 4 (the occasion of the burning bush), we find Moses protesting (v. 1)—

"Behold, they will not believe me."

God says, "What is that in thine hand?" Moses replies, "A rod." Then comes the sign of the rod turned into a serpent, and back again. Concluding the vision, God says (v. 17)—

"Take THIS Rod in thine hand, wherewith thou shalt do signs."

So this is the Rod by which the serpent sign is to be manifested. The particular appointment of this Rod is further emphasized when we note in verse 20 it is called, *"The Rod of God."*

It also helps us to form the picture when we remember (see verse 16) that Aaron is appointed as the mouthpiece for Mose—they are one unit. Verse 30 informs us—

"And Aaron spake all the words which the Lord had spoken unto Moses, and DID THE SIGNS in the sight of the people"

—Aaron did the signs, with *Moses'* Rod—the "Rod of God." Turning to Exodus 7, we find the same thing happening. In verse 10 (at Moses' command) Aaron cast down "his" rod before Pharaoh, and it becomes a serpent. In verse 15 God tells *Moses* to take the Rod which had become a serpent. In verse 17 *Moses* is to speak of it as "the Rod in *mine* hand" smiting the waters. But in verse 19 we find Moses telling Aaron to "Take *thy rod*" and smite the waters.

This was the first plague. If we trace the plagues through, we find that some (Ex. 7:19; 8:6, 17) *Aaron* brings with the Rod, some (9:23; 10:13) *Moses* brings with the (same) Rod.

The point to be noted is that throughout Moses and Aaron act as an interchangeable unit, and it is the *same* Rod—the

"Rod of God." It is again spoken of as the Rod of God when it is used to play an important part in the defeat of Amalek (Ex. 17:9). As long as Moses holds up this Rod, Israel prevails. Truly this is a very important Rod.

Now, in the Scriptures, "rod" is a common figure of *rulership*—of one who rules—particularly, of the Messiah: the King of Kings—

> *"The Lord shall send the Rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies"* (Psa. 110:2).
>
> *"Israel is the Rod of Mine inheritance"* (Jer. 10:16).
>
> *"There shall come forth a Rod out of the Stem of Jesse . . . with righteousness shall he judge"* (Isa. 11:1-4).

So we see in this Rod of Moses and Aaron—this "Rod of God"—the manifested power and authority of God.

At its first mention God's power is manifested in turning it into a serpent and back again to a rod. *Is this just meaningless wonder-working?* On the contrary, here is a deep symbol, embodying the whole purpose of God with man.

God made Adam in *His Own image,* and gave him *dominion* over all the earth—note the two aspects, manifestation and rulership. Solomon records (Ecc. 7:29) that God made man upright, but that man forsook this upright state—that is, *the Rod became a Serpent.* Sin took over, and natural man became the seed of the serpent—no longer the Rod of God.

But God's loving purpose is to bring man back from the serpent condition to the rod condition—to make him again upright, the true and complete image of God, exercising holy and faithful dominion over an earth filled with God's glory.

All this shown in Christ—the typical man—born under the serpent-cursed constitution to which man had fallen, but cleansing and transforming himself from it by obedience, and achieving royal honor and dominion as the chosen Rod of God.

The other two signs of the burning-bush manifestation emphasize the same truths. The hand that became leprous and then was restored to health shows another aspect of the picture. The Rod and Serpent show a change of position and activity—the leprous hand shows a change of physical condition. Leprosy, the dreaded living death that slowly but relentlessly consumed its helpless victims, is a scriptural symbol of the deadly uncleanness of sin.

The *third* and culminating sign was the water of the river *(living water)* poured out on the *dry land* and becoming *blood.*

In John chapter 2 there is something strikingly similar—a "sign" in which poured-out water becomes wine (type of blood)—a sign which appears on the surface to be mere wonder-working, but which undoubtedly has a deep meaning.

It was on the *third* day (Jn. 2:1). And it was the "beginning of miracles (Revised Version signs) that Jesus did." Surely the water that became blood is the Word made flesh for the redemption of fallen man—the blood poured out on a dry and thirsty land.

* * *

When Moses (Num. 20:8) is told to enter the sacred Most Holy Place—the very presence of God—and bring out this Rod, the whole forty-year history of its use would be before his mind, from the time of the burning bush forward.

Now, *all its former uses had been judicial.* This fact has a significant bearing on Moses' action at this time. With it he and Aaron had brought the plagues on Egypt; with it he had smitten Amalek; with it he had smitten the Rock before at God's command; and finally, it had been laid up in the Tabernacle as a testimony *"against the rebels"* who challenged Moses and Aaron's authority.

Now—when rebels are challenging his authority again, God says: *"Take the Rod."* It is perfectly natural, then, that he should smite the Rock, at the same time crying: "Hear now, ye *rebels!"*

It was natural—*but it was wrong.* Moses had lost control of himself, and contact with God. He was not thinking calmly. He was excited and angry, and not paying attention to God's words. Every word God speaks to man is vital. God had plainly said: *"Speak* to the Rock."

* * *

When Miriam had questioned Moses' authority, it was testified:

> *"Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men that were upon the face of the earth"* (Num. 12:3).

Webster's Dictionary defines "meek" as—

> *"Mild of temper, not easily provoked or irritated, patient under injuries: not vain, haughty or resentful."*

Truly a beautiful character. Here is *true* strength. In Proverbs the wisdom of the Spirit tells us (16:32)—

> *"He that ruleth his own spirit is greater than he that taketh a city."*

Meekness is true self-control—the greatest achievement and victory possible to man. And the man Moses was meek above all the men on the face of the earth.

But on this occasion his self-control gave way. Angrily denouncing the children of Israel, he struck the Rock twice. The water came out; the congregation drank; and the incident appeared closed. Moses, though doubtless regretting his brief outburst, would probably—in the light of his forty years of faithful labor—not regard it very seriously.

But it was not closed. God called him to account, and humbled His faithful servant Moses before this evil multitude who were not fit to tie his shoes.

God said to him: *"Ye believed me not."* Did Moses really disbelieve God? Belief is a far greater and deeper thing than mere assent to the truth of a matter. Belief is what we DO. Our *way of life* is the true index of what we actually believe, whatever our *professions* may be.

> *"What doth it profit though a man SAY he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him?"* (Jam. 2:14).

If we SAY we love God and desire to please Him, then deliberately choose a way of life (as marrying into the world) that we know He hates, we clearly demonstrate what our belief actually is—our faith (belief) is in the flesh, not in God.

John, the gentle apostle of love, records plainly and bluntly—

> *"Let no man deceive you: he that DOETH righteousness is righteous."*

Moses did not sanctify God on this occasion—therefore it was necessary for God to sanctify Himself in publicly punishing Moses. David says that, under provocation, Moses "spake unadvisedly with his lips." James warns us (3:6)—

> *"The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. If any man offend not in word, he is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body."*

Not only evil talking, but all *foolish* talking, says Paul, is an abomination to the God of holiness. How much we say lightly—and forget! *But God does not forget.* Jesus said—

> *"Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment"* (Matt. 12:36).

Because of the apparent drasticness of this saying, some have endeavored to water it down by changing the meaning of the word translated "idle," but when we look it up and face it squarely we find it *does* mean "idle." *Saintship is no light thing!*

The word is *"argos,"* meaning "idle, profitless, barren, unfruitful." It carries the idea of empty unproductiveness when there should be usefulness.

* * *

Of the Rock that Moses struck, Paul says (1 Cor. 10:4): *"The Rock was Christ."* Here is a key to something far deeper than the literal transaction, opening up to us a wide panorama of spiritual significance—*"The Rock was Christ."*

There were two incidents of the smitten Rock—one just before Sinai when they had just come out of Egypt, and this present one at the end of the forty years wandering.

The first time, Moses was *commanded* to smite the Rock to bring forth the living water for Israel. It was in God's purpose and providence that Israel, under the Mosaic constitution, should smite the Christ-Rock, releasing the life-giving stream.

But forty years later, at the *end* of the probation period, *after* the wilderness journey, just on the verge of entering the Promised Land, it was God's wisdom to portray a far different state of affairs.

In the meantime the Rod of God had budded with new life, manifesting His divine choice and approval. (Incidently, we learn from the budding that it was the "Rod of an almond-tree," for it "yielded almonds" Num. 17:8.) Jeremiah, amid the desolations of Jerusalem, saw the prophetic budding of an almond-rod (Jer. 1:11).

And the Rod had been laid up beyond the Veil in the Most Holy Place—the very presence of God. *Now,* as the time for entering the land draws near, Moses is to bring forth the Rod out of the Most Holy Place before the whole congregation of Israel, and then by *speaking* to the Rock draw water for the thirsty, waiting people.

It is impossible to miss the significance. The blossomed, resurrected Rod—hidden beyond the Veil—clearly portrays Christ, as does the life-giving Rock.

But how can the Rod and the Rock *both* typify Christ, when one strikes the other? It is exactly the same problem we have in seeing Christ in both the slaying Priest and the slain Offering.

In the first place we must recognize the overall hand of God throughout, in both Rod and Rock. The smiting was ordained by God, and the Rock was provided by God. This unites the two symbols. Not only so, but Christ himself was an active and voluntary participant in the smiting. His crucifixion was his

own voluntary repudiation and smiting of the sin-power, so we can see him in the Rod as well as in the Rock.

Furthermore, we must view the Rod of God in its broad historical perspective. It was first figuratively placed in the hands of Adam—that is, divinely-bestowed authority and dominion.

In Moses' day it was embodied in the Law in the hands of Moses. In Jesus' day the Rod and sceptre of the Kingdom of God was still in the hands of Moses' successors, though the true Rod and heir to the sceptre was in their midst.

In the Age to Come, God will "send the Rod of His strength out of Zion."

But from beginning to end, Christ is at the heart of the Rod symbol, for he was ordained from the world's foundation to be its Ruler and Lawgiver.

When regathered Israel stands in the latter day before the Christ-Rock, at the entrance to the land, *there is to be no repetition of the smiting*—only a humble *speaking* to the Rock.

This was one time above all times in his long and eventful life—when he stood at the end of the wilderness journey before the Christ-Rock as the representative of a regathered and repentant Israel—that Moses needed to portray self-abasement, and humility, and glory to God.

But by his words and actions he made himself a type of the *rebels* who, says Ezekiel (20:38), will be purged out of Israel in the wilderness of the people, and, declares the Spirit,

"THEY SHALL NOT ENTER INTO THE LAND."

And so it was said to Moses, *"Thou shalt not enter."* We see again in these things the limitless depths of divine wisdom in bringing all things into conformity with the interwoven pattern of type and antitype, for apart from this specific sin, it was not fitting that Moses should lead Israel into the Land of Promise.

Why? Because Moses personified the whole Mosaic constitution—the "law of condemnation"—the "ministration of death." The Law could not give life—could not give them the true, eternal entrance to the Land—could not give them the "Rest that remaineth for the People of God."

Therefore Moses, the ministrator of the Old Covenant, could not lead them into the Land—that must be the work of Joshua, the type of Jesus, whose name he prophetically bore.

In like manner the High Priest Aaron, too, must give way to a successor before the inheritance is entered into—for, as Paul says (Heb. 7:12), the Mosaic Law and the Levitical priesthood

stood and fell together; a change in one required a change in the other also.

So—beginning in verse 23—we find the instructions for Aaron's death and the transferring of his office to another. God says (v. 24)—

"He shall not enter, because ye REBELLED against My Word."

Moses had addressed Israel as rebels—*"Hear now, ye rebels!"*—little realizing that in God's sight he himself was a rebel in that very act. Surely a sobering lesson for us in the life of this great man. *It is when we are condemning others that we are most likely to fall into condemnation ourselves.*

When faithfulness to the Truth requires us to take a stand for what is right, and to stand aside from what is wrong, let us be especially careful to remember this lesson. We may warn, and exhort, and point out what we believe is wrong, and sorrowfully separate—but it is not ours to condemn. At such a time especially, meekness and humbleness and kindness and gentleness (in *heart* and not just in oily *words*) is essential—

"Considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted."

At God's command, Aaron ascends Mt. Hor to die. He is stripped of his priestly garments of "Glory and Beauty," and they are placed upon his son Eleazar.

In this solemn ceremony, the weakness and imperfections of the Levitical priesthood are emphasized. In Hebrews 7 Paul points out these imperfections, in contrast to the perfect priesthood of Christ.

He says Christ's priesthood is *eternal*, but the Levitical was but temporary and passing. This we see in Eleazar superseding Aaron who headed and personified the Levitical order.

In the Levitical, Paul says, *men with infirmities served*—how sadly this is illustrated in the circumstances of Aaron's punishment!

Then, he points out, apart from any specific wrong-doing, death must inevitably claim every succeeding Levitical priest, because they are mortal. This, too, is portrayed in this scene on Mt. Hor.

Now Miriam and Aaron are gone—and Moses alone remains. These three were all about 120 years old. A vast gulf separated them from the multitude of Israel, among whom were now none over sixty.

In between was a lost generation, whose carcases had fallen in the wilderness—a generation that had been transformed in a day from the degradation of slavery to the true kings of the earth—a royal nation, a kingdom of holy priests.

They had been divinely chosen from all the people of the earth and had stood closer to God than any other nation or generation before or since.

But of this once greatly-favored host only two now remained—Caleb and Joshua—the faithful two who had incurred the rebellious multitude's bitter enmity by standing out against them on the side of God.

* * *

Just previous to Aaron's death (Num. 20:14-21), Israel had sought permission to travel through Edom on their way to the promised land. Edom were the descendants of Esau—Jacob's brother—but Edom's attitude was far from brotherly, for they turned Israel back at the point of the sword.

Was not this a time for God to show Himself strong on behalf of His people? Apparently not. God's hand has often been withheld while His faithful people have been abused and humbled, and the ungodly have triumphed.

Even in Old Testament times, warfare was not the prerogative of man but of God. It would have been as wrong for them to have warred against Edom on this occasion, as it would have been to have refused to war against Canaan.

Edom in Hebrew is the same basic word as *Adam*, and means "red." Edom, like Adam, stands for the flesh, and it adds great interest to the relations between Israel and Edom throughout their history when we see therein a symbolic portrayal of the lifelong conflict between the spirit and the flesh. Israel must submit, for this was the time of their testing and discipline. Edom dwelt in comfortable plenty, Israel must still labor through a wilderness.

Edom's refusal was another bitter test for Israel, and a great added hardship. As they stood at the edge of Edom's fruitful valleys and respectfully asked a favor of one from whom they had reason to expect kindness and sympathy, it seemed that escape from that "great and terrible wilderness," and the long, monotonous sameness of food, was finally at hand.

How bitter, then, their disappointment at being threateningly rebuffed and turned back and forced to make the long wilderness journey once again toward the Red Sea and around and up the other side of Edom's territory!

"And they journeyed from Mt. Hor by the way of the Red Sea, to compass the land of Edom: and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way" (Num. 21:4).

Once again they were marching *away from* the Promised Land instead of toward it. It is necessary to fully realize the severity of their trial to truly evaluate its significance and results, and to learn its lessons.

Our circumstances are far easier than Israel's, our blessings are far more abundant, our trials far less, and the strengthening knowledge revealed to us far greater. And God—Who was hidden in the terrible cloud and smoke and thunder of Sinai—has drawn personally near to us in the person of His Son.

As Paul points out (Heb. 12:18-24), we do not have to stand afar off at the base of the shaking, burning mountain that dare not be touched on the pain of instant death—but we have come nigh to God through Jesus the Mediator of the New and better Covenant. And yet *we* often murmur, and are cast down, and "discouraged because of the way!" *How DARE we be discouraged,* in the face of the glorious divine assurance and promises!

At this point, Israel in their despair committed one of their worst offenses, and received one of their worst punishments. Not only did they again rail at Moses, and murmur, but *they spoke despisingly of the Manna*—the heavenly bread that God had lovingly provided.

"Our soul loatheth this light bread" (v. 5).

These were terrible words! We know the meaning of the Heavenly Bread. Moses had in anger smitten the Rock; now the people reject and despise the Bread.

The Manna was a constant miracle of divine care, not only in its regular provision, but in the fact that none appeared on the Sabbath, and then only would it keep two days. They were provided for but ONE DAY AT A TIME. If hoarded, it "bred worms and stank" before God. *Do we perceive the lesson?* Have we ever pondered on the deep significance of the prayer the Master taught?

"Give us THIS DAY our daily bread."

"Our souls loatheth this light bread" . . . "We want the spicy meats of the world—we are tired of this thin, unexciting spiritual food—we prefer the onions (and the slavery) of Egypt."

We would never say this in so many words, but it is so easy, by our actions, to say plainly to God: *"Our soul loatheth this light bread."*

Israel were the subjects of the greatest opportunity and adventure that had ever befallen a nation. They had seen the great Egyptian Empire humbled (Egypt at that time was the fear and marvel of the world). They had seen the sea miraculously parted before them and closed upon their enemies. The perpetual pillar of fire and cloud led them, and to them was offered the glorious mission of being set apart from all nations to manifest God to mankind and pioneer the world to everlasting holiness and peace.

But they never rose to a conception of their divine mission. Though the divine hands lifted them up as a nation, and set before them marvellous visions of eternal things, still they remained earthly and untransformed. The glories and responsibilities of the divine selection could not drive from their minds the lust for the onions of Egypt.

Is that happening to us today? Are we unmoved at the touch of the divine fire, stumbling on our blind, earthy way, and taking the great vision of the unspeakable glory of the Sonship of God as simply the natural sequel of a natural life? *The Sons of God are only those who live in the spiritual atmosphere of an all-consuming zeal for divine things.*

As a nation, Israel had no interest in the wonderful imagery of the Tabernacle. They had no conception of the significance of the heavenly bread they despised. These things are not recorded that we may look down with pitying condescension on what we may regard as their incomprehensible blindness (in contrast to our assumption of perception). Rather they should teach us a deep, searching humility—a constant and trembling self-examination. *Perhaps WE are not as far from their example as we assume.*

Paul sadly said to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 3:2)—

> *"I have fed you with milk, and not with meat, for ye are not able to bear it—for ye are carnal."*

And to the Hebrews (5:11-14)—

> *"We have many things to say* (about the great Melchizedek-Priest), *and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing . . ."*
>
> *"For when ye ought to be teachers, ye have need of milk, and not of strong meat: strong meat belongeth to them of full age."*

What would he say of us? How do we stand in relation to this same "meat?" Are *we* growing acceptably and pleasingly *"in grace and in the knowledge of the glory of God?"* It is all too

possible to unconsciously repeat the tragic error of blind Israel at the very time we are pitying that blindness.

God's action in this instance was swift and terrible—

"The Lord sent fiery serpents among them, and they bit the people, and many died" (v. 6).

When they were afflicted they repented, as was to be their unworthy custom with monotonous regularity all down their history, until finally the long-suffering of God was withdrawn.

God chastens His children in the process of their development, but when this process is repeated over and over with no permanent effect, it amounts to mocking God and despising His longsuffering. It is easy to get into the habit of assuming that repentance will always bring forgiveness, until life becomes a mechanical see-saw of commission and confession.

THERE MUST BE A PROGRESSIVE "OVERCOMING." The promise is only "to him that overcometh." Note how this phrase is *seven times emphatically repeated*—at the summation of each of the seven messages to the ecclesias (Rev. 2 and 3).

At God's instruction Moses made a serpent of brass and put it upon a pole, and whosoever was bitten—and looked upon it—lived. Jesus said (Jn. 3:15)—

"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish."

How could a *brass serpent* be a type of Christ? A serpent of brass is a perfect symbol of the body of sin—sin's flesh—that was publicly and historically condemned in the crucifixion of Christ.

That crucifixion is the turning-point of human history. While—to outward appearances—it was apparent shameful victory of sin over Christ, it was actually the glorious victory of Christ over sin. How often are things in God's sight the very opposite of what they outwardly seem!

Cooperating in the great work of justifying God and creating a foundation for the extension of God's mercy while honoring His holiness, Jesus voluntarily submitted to this public condemnation and repudiation of the serpent-cursed body of sin—the body of which Paul said—

"In me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing."

Those who know the Truth, and realize the value and REALITY of Christ's mortal warfare with the devil, and his complete victory over him, will have no difficulty in seeing in the brazen serpent, the devil—sin's flesh—defeated and con-

demned and crucified on the hill of Calvary—the *banner and ensign* of the greatest victory that any man has ever won.

In the original, "serpent of brass" is *"nechosh nechosheth"*—for the words for "brass" and "serpent" are from exactly the same Hebrew root. This adds great fitness to the use throughout Scripture of brass as a symbol of the flesh.

Moses was commanded to put the serpent of brass "upon a pole." The Hebrew word here translated "pole" should be *"standard, banner, or ensign"*—that which is a rallying-point for armies in battle—this word is almost invariably so translated elsewhere.

It is the same word (*nes*) as occurs in the expression "Jehovah-Nissi"—*The Lord Our Banner*—the name given to the altar built by Moses to commemorate the victory over the Amalek-sinpower by the lifting up of the Rod of God (Ex. 17:9, 15).

The uplifted serpent of brass was the saving ensign of serpent-bitten Israel, just as its great anti-type is the banner and ensign of all the sin-smitten race who look to him for life. Isaiah uses this same Hebrew word *nes ten* times, in stirring imagery, as—

> *"At that day there shall be a Root of Jesse who shall stand for an ensign of the people: to him shall the Gentiles seek, and his rest shall be glorious!"* (Isa. 11:10).

We note that the ensign has two parts—the Rod erect and triumphant, the Serpent conquered and impaled.

In later years, in the fulness of Israel's degeneracy, this brazen serpent became an object of ignorant superstition and worship (just as the cross of Christ has today) and Hezekiah, *the great typical Temple-cleanser*, "broke it in pieces, and called it Nechushtan—a piece of brass" (2 Kgs. 18:4).

* * *

Paul says all these things were "written for our admonition" and are "able to make us wise unto salvation." In the divinely-recorded history of Israel, we have the wonderful "patterns of things in the heavenlies."

How clearly we see the Messiah in the budded rod, the water-giving Rock, the great Mosaic Lawgiver and Prophet—meekest of all men, the dying and yet continuing High Priest, the heaven-sent manna, the glorious saving ensign of the uplifted serpent—just as we see him in our day in the bread and the wine, *and the open Bible, for "His Name is called The Word of*

God"—he was that Word made flesh. David prayed, with a yearning heart—

> *"Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy Law."*

This mind *must be in us,* if we are to be among the few chosen from the earth's perishing millions. We *must* make ourselves one with the Word of God—steep ourselves in it—live constantly in its atmosphere—both the written Word and the living Word, for they are one. John says (1 Jn. 2:5)—

> *"Whoso keepeth his Word, in him verily is the love of God perfected. Hereby KNOW we that we are in him!"*

And then he adds—

> *"He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, EVEN AS HE WALKED."*

Do we walk *"even as Jesus walked?"* We have the four-fold story of his marvellous, heavenly life on earth, and this great Book of rich and entrancing symbol that all revolves around him . . .

Is he our pattern in all we do or say? Let us make it our daily endeavor—our *whole ambition in life*—to "be in him" and to "walk even as he walked."

Today the ecclesial world—as we have known it—is being torn to pieces. Ensigns that have long been faithfully upheld are being pulled down. Though it saddens us, it need not worry us. It is the last days—*these things must be.* Salvation is an individual matter, and in the end those who are trying to be faithful will be more and more alone.

Let us, therefore, let this one obsession possess each mind like a transforming, consuming fire, crowding out all doubt and fear—

> *"Hereby KNOW we that we are in him—IF the love of God is perfected in us . . . and we walk even as he walked."*

The Sword Shall Never Depart

"Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in His sight? Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house, because thou hast despised Me" (2 Sam. 12:9-10).

The very next chapter begins to record the working out of this decree, in the case of Amnon's foolishness and sin. For two full years, Absalom quietly waited his time, plotting vengeance for his sister, and finally the opportunity came, and he slew Amnon, and David begins to feel the inescapable hand of God's righteous judgment.

The mother of Absalom, as far as is recorded, was the only foreigner among David's wives, and thus God works out the punishment of one sin through the consequences of another. Absalom, whose name, pathetically enough, means "*Father of Peace,*" was the principal instrument of David's punishment; and David's extreme grief at his death, after all his treachery, seems to indicate a special attachment to Absalom, even above his other children, and a bitter realization of what might have been had he himself acted differently.

Three years Absalom spends in exile at Geshur, and two more in Jerusalem before the king is reconciled to him. Seven years have now passed. Having returned, Absalom goes about cunningly to steal the hearts of the men of Israel. How easily are people deceived by a fair show and smooth words! How shallow and unstable is human loyalty! And, above all, how sharply the case of Absalom brings out the fundamental baseness of human nature, teaching us to ever look with distrust upon our natural desires and reactions.

Paul speaks of the foolishness of those who compared themselves with themselves and consequently found nothing wrong. Comparing their actions with their own natural conceptions and thoughts they found that they agreed perfectly. *But what of the mind of God?* A man's own heart is no safe guide.

But there is a lesson even in Absalom's wickedness—the lesson of the unjust steward. Absalom yielded himself wholeheartedly to selfishness, and the murder of his own father was the logical conclusion, as he stood in his way. Having given himself over to evil, it would have been foolish to draw the line anywhere. He was wiser in his generation than those who

go halfway into evil and still attempt to cling to an appearance of good, or those who but half-heartedly follow that which is good. Having chosen his course, he followed it through to the end and hesitated at nothing.

It was truly an evil, human course, but his pursuance of it is a lesson in single-minded perseverance. And his scheming patience, although directed to base and selfish ends, is an illustration of the latent powers in us all which are equally effective for evil or good.

Two years he quietly waited to avenge himself upon Amnon, but the wait did not dull the keen edge of his determination. How long before his insurrection he had harbored ambitions for his father's throne is not disclosed, but there is no haste in his methods—only a painstaking and tireless singleness of purpose and a long and skillful planning—so thorough that when the moment came all Israel was with him, and so secret that David was taken wholly unawares.

Absalom was strong-willed, clever, ruthless and patient—attributes which could have made him as much a power for good as he was for evil, if he had been moved by the wisdom that is from above, instead of that which is from beneath. God allowed him to go far on the course he chose, for it suited God's purpose to do so, and each successful step would further embolden him for the next.

But when the proper time came, God turned his wisdom to foolishness and everything he had taken so long to build collapsed like a house of cards, and destroyed him in its ruins.

> *"The Lord appointed to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, to the intent that the Lord might bring evil upon Absalom."*

What chance had Absalom's wisest scheming in the face of that? He was clever, and he prospered for a while, but the final chapter of his career revealed him as a pitiful and relatively insignificant tool in the hands of God Who was by bitter tribulation shaping the character of a far better man. In all things, *consider the end.*

The events connected with Absalom, tragic though they were, were not without a purpose; and even a certain amount of comfort, for David. The truest depths of friendship are only experienced in adversity; and the loyalty of Ittai the Gittite, and the faithful kindness of Barzillai the Gileadite, would go far toward bearing David up against the infidelity of his son. We are so constituted, in the mercy of God, that sorrow will add

a keenness to the comfort of common blessings that are only shallowly appreciated in times of ease.

And the occasion, too, made possible one incident which, while galling at the time, brought out the underlying nobility and gentleness of David's character and would give him much satisfaction later as a bitter trial faithfully and commendably borne. That was the cursing of Shimei of the house of Saul, who viciously taunted David as he fled from Absalom, and insolently stoned him. When Abishai desired permission to destroy him, David said —

> *"Behold, my son—which came forth of my bowels—seeketh my life. How much more now may this Benjamite do it? Let him alone, and let him curse; for the Lord hath bidden him. It may be that the Lord will look on mine affliction, and the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day."*

Weak and human though he was in many respects, he was at heart in full harmony with the mind of God. He realized that these trials were a necessary chastening from God to tame his unruly desires, and that the better he endured them, the shorter they would have to be.

As we look back, David seems to stand out apart from all others in the history of Israel. Moses truly is a far more majestic and awe-inspiring figure; Abraham exemplifies the nobility of a patient, enduring faith through a long and weary pilgrimage; but it is into the heart of David that we enter most closely. His life seems crowded with every variety of experience, and ranges from the purest God-fearing courage of his youthful encounter with Goliath to the ugly depths of adultery and murder.

His life was a battle between the highest and most intimate spiritual conceptions of God on the one hand, and all the strong currents of human nature on the other. That he repeatedly failed is true, but what is far more important is that he freely and humbly recognized his failures and continued to press on, accepting every form of tribulation with unresentful resignation.

His life, on the whole, was a broken and frustrated one. A long period he spent as a hunted fugitive—a wanderer away from his country and kindred, attended by a motley following whose company must have been on the whole small comfort and a constant burden. Then, after his wanderings end and he finally becomes king and has subdued all his enemies, he

stumbles into a grievous sin which plagues him without respite for the rest of his life.

Had Jonathan lived, much may have been different in David's life, but such was not the purpose of God. The affection between them was of the most exceptional character, calling for the strongest terms of description. In the friendship of Jonathan, David could have found satisfaction and guidance for the restless desires that led him into pitfalls. But it was God's will that he should learn alone.

After Jonathan's death, David seems to have found affinity with no one, and such comfort as he could get in the course of a life of disappointment and turmoil he must get by a direct and lonely approach to God by himself which, while infinitely more difficult, was perhaps in the ultimate for the best.

The Psalms could never have been written by a man who could find satisfaction and comfort in anything short of a direct and individual communion with God. And therefore, in the wisdom of God, it was Joab and not Jonathan who became David's lifelong companion, though such would never have been David's choice.

God's purpose with David was very high, and David had much to learn. Therefore considerations of his present comfort must give way to those which through long and bitter tribulation would develop in him the peaceable fruits of purity and righteousness.

The wisdom of God chose a vessel ideally suited to His purpose, and no small part of that purpose was the recording of the Psalms. The strong light of the inspiring Spirit, shining through every facet of David's character and experiences, threw as on a screen each detail of hope and despair, of failure and triumph.

Moses' character is made before we meet him as he comes on a divine mission from the wilderness to deliver Israel from bondage. But in the Psalms every aspect of David's development is laid bare before us. Christ alone combined the exalted and prophetic majesty of Moses with the keen humanity of David. Tried and tempted in all points like his brethren, he alone as the representative of mankind fulfilled all the experiences portrayed through David in the Psalms and emerged triumphant and unspotted from them.

David typifies the body of Christ, those whom Christ came to redeem, the chosen generation, the spirit willing and eager

but the flesh weak, a man after God's own heart, who through much tribulation must learn the way to the kingdom.

But David, as the writer of the Psalms, was permitted to be the instrument by which Christ was encouraged and strengthened. And each of the members, too, can in some small way share in this honor. For it was for the joy that was set before him that he was enabled to endure, and that joy consisted in the love and affection of those who gratefully accept the benefits he procured.

Our participation in the victory is measured, therefore, by our affection for him, and the value of that vice-royalty is increased by each one that lays hold upon it.

Between Joab and David there was no affinity. David was a man of God. Joab was not. No greater gulf could separate two men than that. They lived in different worlds. David repeatedly struggled and fell, but from beginning to end he was a man of God, intensely loyal and devoted.

Joab was a man of the world. Wiser at times than David, and strangely enough, sometimes his perception rose higher than David's, but to the deeper currents of divine communion which were the basis of David's life, Joab was a stranger.

In his reaction to David's grief for Absalom, Joab is practical and wise. But David could see many things to which Joab was utterly blind. David could see that day many years earlier when the prophet Nathan had stood before him and had solemnly spoken of the great anger of God and the consequences he would have to suffer. David could now see the humiliation of Tamar and the murder of Amnon, his firstborn. He could see that now another wayward son had been taken, leaving behind an ignoble memory of treachery and dishonor, all the consequences of his own folly and sin. And he would wonder where and when the next blow would fall.

But Joab's rough counsel would sharply remind him that his pilgrimage was not yet ended. Those terrible words would always be before his mind—*"Now, therefore, the sword shall never depart from thine house,"* and he would see dimly, stretching into the future, a continuation of that trail of wickedness and bloodshed which he had set in motion. And so, aroused once again by Joab's brusque prodding, he concealed his grief that no one would understand, and carried on.

Doth Job Fear God for Nought?

"I have uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not . . . Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:3-6).

We are once again reading together the marvelous book of Job. It is the only non-Jewish book of the Bible, and it is in all probability the oldest book of the Bible. Many eminent men—both religious and non-religious—have called it the supreme literary production in all the world's history. It is, from any point of view, a most remarkable piece of writing.

THE PLACE AND TIME

From the names of the characters and their ancestors, and the place names, the *location* of the story lies in the area between the Dead Sea and the desert, or somewhat to the north or south of that: the area of the descendants of Abraham other than through Jacob—generally speaking, the Arabs. Job was one of the "Men of the East," a term applied to the Arabs: Ishmaelites, Edomites, etc. And the *time* seems most likely to be during the two hundred or so years Israel was in Egypt. All the background and customs and genealogy point to this place and time.

As to how the book of Job got into an otherwise wholly Jewish Bible, there is a strong and ancient Jewish tradition that Moses wrote it, or at least made it part of the Scriptures—by the guidance of the Spirit of course. Moses would have been the logical one to do so. He may well have known Job himself, or Job's early descendants, during the forty years he was in Midian. Job was the greatest (and therefore best known) of the "Men of the East" (Job 1:3), and Midian would be included in that area. The history of Job would be well-known there.

It is remarkable that the great typical and exemplary patient sufferer of the Old Testament is not a Jew, but rather is of a race which—though closely related—was always, and still is, in deep antagonism to the Jews. He was a Gentile—a non-Jew, that is—of the seed of Abraham, adding to the beauty and fitness of the typical picture.

A NON-JEWISH MODEL OF EXCELLENCE

Here, in the midst of an otherwise Jewish book, is a perfect model of excellence for all time: a man who is not a Jew, not under the Law, who had nothing to do with the Law, nothing to do with Israel. He is referred to by Ezekiel (14:14), with Noah

and Daniel, as three outstanding examples of righteousness. He is referred to by James (5:11) as the ultimate example of patient, faithful suffering.

The story opens with the simple picture of worshipers of God coming together before Him, and among them a bitter, jealous adversary making a travesty and mockery of it. Orthodoxy represents its Devil as having free access to God's heaven, and being God's agent and accomplice. One respectable modern commentary, the *"New Bible Commentary,"* says concerning this scene that the Devil is a "divine agent," and is the "supreme cynic of the heavenly court." What a debased, pagan conception of God's holy dwelling-place!—in perfect harmony with the crude gods and heavens of Greece and Rome, but certainly not with the Scriptures of Truth.

"Doth Job fear God for nought?" He DID: and so must we. Our motive must be love alone, and not self-benefit, though self-benefit will inevitably follow, for goodness can lead only at last to goodness, in a world ruled by the goodness of God. But our *motivation* must be pure love of God and of goodness.

WHY DO THE RIGHTEOUS SUFFER?

The great *question* of the book of Job is: Why do the righteous suffer? And the great *lesson* is: We must totally and unquestioningly trust God, and have implicit faith in His love, mercy and justice, regardless of any appearances or circumstances. He has a reason and a purpose in the suffering of His people: different reasons at different times, but all working toward their ultimate glorification—often a reason (as here) that would be impossible for man ever to guess without knowing what was in God's mind.

The sufferings of Christ point to the same problem: *Why?* We can dimly perceive how he was "made perfect through suffering," and how his perfect submission to that suffering laid the eternal foundation for the world's redemption from *all* suffering.

But, above all, we must unhesitatingly *accept* the ways of God because He *is* God; because He manifestly has made all things, and knows the reason for all. He has manifested His infinite power and wisdom in all the beauties and glories of Creation. He proclaims His love and justice in His Word. He overwhelmingly manifests His divinity in that Word.

We must accept the whole picture, or reject the whole picture. To reject it in the light of its overpowering evidence is stupidity. To question God's ways in the light of His overpowering

greatness is obviously equal stupidity. This is the lesson of Job. The final outcome manifested God's wisdom and love and compassion. We must have implicit trust that it always will—*if we do our part faithfully.*

It was a high honor and privilege for Job to be used by God to demonstrate for all ages what true righteousness and faith really is, and to give an example of patient integrity in the face of what appeared to everyone, including Job himself, a deliberate divine effort to afflict and torment him to the uttermost.

JOB AND CHRIST: STRIKING PARALLELS

We see throughout, a very striking, broad parallel between Job and Christ, although there are necessarily differences and contrasts.

Both were the outstandingly righteous men of their age.

Both suffered more intensely and grievously than is recorded of any other man. Christ suffered more greatly, and more extendedly, for he lived his whole life in the shadow of the inevitable cross, under the constant burden of required perfection, or all Creation would have been betrayed. And in his deep and superhuman empathy, he suffered all the sufferings of his people of all ages. Infinitely more even than Paul he could say: *"Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is offended, and I burn not?"*

He was pre-eminently a Man of Sorrows (Isa. 53:3), though at the same time a Man of incomparable Joy (Jn. 15:11; 17:13).

With both, God knew from the beginning that they would hold fast to the end, regardless of the intensity of the trial: and God built His purpose upon that assurance. What a glorious role for men to play! If Job had failed, the adversary would have been triumphant, and God would have been put to shame: His whole dispensation of love exposed as mere self-serving.

Both were reduced in shame from the highest position to the lowest, though in different ways. Christ, as the only begotten Son of God, was the potential heir of the universe. As Paul explains to the Philippians (2:6-8), though finding himself the one special man above all men, even the "Fellow" of God (Zech. 13:7), entitled to the homage of the angels (Heb. 1), yet he humbled himself, and accepted the form of a slave, even to the most ignominious of deaths.

Both were utterly despised and rejected. Both were assumed by their own people and generation to be under the special curse of God, at the very time they were suffering for the sake of others. For we must recognize that Job's sufferings went far

beyond himself, and were for universal instruction and comfort and guidance. It was not an aimless wager, when God staked all on Job's integrity, but an essential manifestation of the noble, vital, spiritual principle of faithful integrity for its own sake alone, under the extremist of testings: the *key to salvation.* We must do good simply because we love the good and hate the evil.

MADE PERFECT BY SUFFERING

Both were "made perfect by suffering." This is a deep and important aspect in both cases. Christ, though of unblemished righteousness, was not "perfect" until he had, in loving and all-trusting obedience, passed through the required suffering and sacrificial death.

Job was the most righteous man of his day: a giant of faith and endurance—"perfect and upright," "none like him in all the earth," according to the testimony of God Himself (Job 1:8). Still, Job has something to learn, something in which to be developed and brought to beautiful fruition, as he at last freely and humbly confesses (40:4; 42:6).

Unquestionably, Job was a better, wiser, greater, more understanding man, much closer to God, after his terrible trial than before. And he had attained to a far higher position in the Divine Purpose and Manifestation. As a prosperous and honored sheik, he never would have fully known God. He never would have become an inspiration and example for all ages. He never would have been granted the unique and inestimable privilege of the direct Divine revelation he received.

GOD'S UNIQUE SELF-MANIFESTATION TO JOB

Was ever a man the subject of so full and personal and searching a Divine address to himself? God did not deign to *explain,* for that would have been utterly inappropriate, and would not have accomplished the desired result. We must first *accept* God and all His ways fully and unquestioningly, before we can hope for any explanation of their mysteries.

But God condescended to take the time and trouble to fully and in detail manifest Himself and His majesty to Job, as He did to none other we know of but Christ himself. God's address to Job is unique in all Scripture.

Job at last received that which he had so passionately pleaded for: a direct divine manifestation. It would be well worth all the scorn and abuse and terrible suffering he had endured. Indeed, its value and power would be greatly heightened by that dark background. What a joyful, glorious, inspir-

ing, comforting memory for the last one hundred and forty years of his life!—a life which he thought was already over. How much closer he would now be to God for that long period of recompense for his trials! How much more at peace—for there are hints that for all his religious efforts and prosperity, he was not before truly at peace. In the anguish of his suffering, he makes such revelations as this—

"That which I GREATLY FEARED is come upon me" (3:25).

But never again would he fear anything. *Now* his peace was deep and strong. The ordeal was dreadful, but we see its wholesome benefits.

JOB'S CRUSHING AVALANCHE OF AFFLICTION

Job's afflictions were many and cumulative. They would quickly have destroyed a lesser man. In evaluating Job and what he at times says, we must strive to comprehend the almost incomprehensible extent to which he was tortured and tried in so many ways at once.

First, he lost all his possessions and livelihood. In swift succession, calamity upon calamity fell crushingly upon him. And with it, he lost his whole family of ten beloved children in what was obviously a direct divine blow, unexplained and unprovoked: his cherished family for which he had constantly prayed and offered sacrifice.

His reaction was perfect, unhesitating, total acceptance and worship—

"The Lord gave, the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

Then, in seeming heartless response by God to this loving and godly reaction, he was smitten from head to foot—again obviously by the hand of God—with the most painful, loathsome and abhorred disease known to man, inevitably fatal in terrible suffering in the natural course of events: a particularly repulsive form of consuming, deforming leprosy, universally regarded as a manifestation of God's especial wrath.

Then his wife turned against him—and all his friends and acquaintances. And he found himself a universally abandoned pariah, cast out of the city, consigned to the refuse heap to die a lingering death: the butt of ridicule and abuse by the vilest class of the people, who tormented him for their depraved amusement.

Job was totally rejected, and driven "without the gate" by those who considered themselves the "Holy City."

In the raw meanness of ordinary human nature, everyone was gratified to see this mighty man, this presumed paragon of righteousness, crushed and humbled in the mire, and eager to add their own miserable quota to his overflowing misery. They spit in his face, he says. Exactly the same thing is said of Christ (Matt. 26:67): the deepest degradation and insult. "Crucify him! Crucify him! He pretended to be so good!" It was his very God-attested goodness that so enraged the blind evil fury of the flesh against him.

THE FRIENDS COME

And so time dragged on wearily, with Job lying in misery in the ashes (2:8) (the Septuagint says "dung-heap," which is probably the meaning), until his three especial friends heard of his calamities, and assembled to comfort him. They were so struck with his misery and dreadful appearance that they sat around him in silence for seven days. Then, when he repeatedly implored their comfort and sympathy, they more and more heatedly condemned him and accused him of the vilest crimes and hypocrisies.

This is the background against which we must consider him. Truly, like Moses, under tremendous stress he "spake unadvisedly with his lips."

Job is throughout wrestling tremendously with this problem. Upon the shame and misery of his condition is heaped the smug and self-righteous condemnation of his closest friends. His friends' rejection aroused an over-reaction in what he said, but threw him more and more on God. He had sought their support and sympathy against the hand of God. They railed on him, thinking they were thereby earning God's favor. This added to his bitterness, but it showed him there was nowhere to turn for comfort and understanding but to God Himself.

The friends' condemnation was an essential part of the trial, and of the final result. Though it added immeasurably to his grief, it was probably more helpful to him (in a way opposite what they intended) than their sympathy would have been.

JOB'S GREATEST AGONY: GOD'S SEEMING REJECTION

All forsook him in his extremity. But his greatest agony was not in his sufferings, nor in his rejection by all mankind, but *God's* apparent rejection and forsaking and enmity. Again and again he implores God for but one word of hope or comfort or recognition, but is met with total silence, and increased oppression. Even when he seeks brief, exhausted surcease in sleep, he is terrified with awful dreams (7:14).

To judge what he says, we must consider *all* he said, and the *order* in which he said it; just as we must consider the whole of Psalm 22, and not just the first few words from it that Christ quoted on the cross. It is all too easy to get his cries of anguish out of proportion, as if they were the studied and final conclusions reached coolly and theoretically in ease and comfort.

The fundamental fact is that Job held fast his trust in God, and would not deviate from his dedication to righteousness (which has no meaning outside of faith in God); and he was confident throughout of final resurrection, and of God's open manifestation to him at last.

There is no more triumphant victory of faith than is expressed in his memorable words, wrung from him in the depth of present despair—

> *"Though he slay me, yet will I trust him . . . He also shall be my salvation!"*
>
> *"If a man die, shall he live again? All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come. Thou shalt call, and I will answer Thee. Thou wilt have a desire (kasaph: longing) to the work of Thine hands."*
>
> *"I KNOW that my redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day UPON THE EARTH . . . Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold"* (13:15-16; 14:14-15; 19:25-27).

WHY SUCH DREADFUL AFFLICTION?

His complaints are not against God's *overall* justice, but against His seeming injustice in the affairs of this life—especially that one who tried so hard to obey should be picked out for the most terrible of afflictions, while all men gloated, and the wicked were at ease. Job knew that at last all would be righted, but why this special, dreadful, unprovoked affliction of a righteous and faithful man?

The friends fall silent. Job restates his case at length (chapters 26-31) with great power and beauty: conceding that the wicked are finally punished; conceding God's infinite might and understanding; conceding that man's whole wisdom is to fear God and depart from evil—but again long and stoutly declaring his own righteousness, and crying for the opportunity of debating his case with God, confident of victory.

Then a new figure enters, the young Elihu, who prepares Job for the final revelation from God. He introduces the idea that suffering is not only for punishment, as the friends contended, but has many uses in the love and wisdom of God: constructive

loving discipline, directional chastisement of a Father, strengthening by training and rigor, manifestation and deepening of faith, purification—especially purification, making perfect. Suffering can and must lead to fuller understanding, and thus be a blessing. Job makes no attempt to answer Elihu.

GOD SPEAKS

Then God speaks. It is notable that Job was given just what he asked: an opportunity to stand up to God and argue with Him, to show Him how He must be mistaken. But how swiftly Job's bold self-assurance fled before the mighty manifestation of God's infinite wisdom and power!

That God should deign to speak to man at all—especially to one calling His ways in question—is a tremendous condescension in itself, a tremendous and unique honor, and manifestation of love for Job.

As God spoke of the endless marvels of His Creation, Job shrank to nothing. Crushed in shame, he learned to rest totally and unreservedly in God, devastated by the sudden realization of the stupidity and presumption of daring to challenge God and question His ways.

When God brought Job to the comfort and peace of unquestioning love and trust, He thereby solved all Job's problems, even before He removed Job's afflictions. *Their* removal came later, *after* Job had waived all his complaints, and prostrated himself in loving worship.

God banished Job's questions, not by answering them, but by totally removing them from his concern. Job was wholly satisfied that whatever God did must be right, and must be rooted in love and wisdom.

God's answer was to give no answer, but to manifest a God so great that no answer was needed. To need an explanation and justification of anything God does is to have a degraded and unacceptable conception of God. He is infinitely above all question and accountability.

MAN DARE NOT QUESTION GOD

Job was faithful and righteous above all his contemporaries, and completely, actively dedicated to good works, and to service to God and man. He demonstrated his firm and unshakable endurance, and that he unselfishly loved goodness for goodness' sake alone. But he did not have the necessary total self-abasing humility and recognition of self-nothingness until he was crushed by the divine revelation. The

learning of this was the supreme blessing of his entire experience.

The whole lesson of God's self-manifestation to Job is the limitless greatness of God, and the utter littleness of man. If God had stooped to explain Himself to Job before totally humbling him in the recognition of his nothingness, then God would have been conceding man's right to judge God and demand an answer for His ways. And this right man must be made to fully realize that he *just does not have.* It is absurd and unthinkable that puny little ignorant created man should for one *moment* question God, Who effortlessly maintains the numberless stars and galaxies in their myriad courses throughout the universe. What is weak, brief-lived, earth crawling man to question his Creator?

But when Job humbled himself, and cast away all self-importance, God graciously went much further to set Job's mind at perfect rest, and doubly compensated him for all his faithfully-borne suffering and shame. He totally vindicated and honored him before his self-righteous friends, and gave Job the joyful, forgiving privilege of being their mediator.

RESTORATION

And then He justified Job before his whole community, and made him twice as rich as he had been before. After what Job had bitterly learned of the fickle respect and fellowship of *men* (who fled when he needed them, and came back shamelessly seeking his favor when he was restored), and had gloriously learned of the companionship of *God,* the riches and honor would mean little to him, except as an even greater opportunity to resume his former course of goodness and guidance and charity to others, succoring the needy and defending the oppressed.

Some have felt that the restoration of the temporal riches and honor detracts from the spiritual force of the story, which is otherwise played out on a wholly spiritual plane. Such think incorrectly, again unwisely judging God's ways. It was fitting and necessary—for the instruction of all Job's associates, and all since—to complete the picture by the double restoration of all he had lost.

And it brings the closing picture fully into harmony with the antitype. Job, in well-deserved riches and honor—after passing triumphantly through all his trials for the inspirational and instructional benefit of the race—rejoiced to see his sons and his sons' sons, in peace and prosperity.

So Christ, in eternal riches and honor, shall see his redeemed Seed: a holy, perfected "generation of the race"—

"HE SHALL SEE OF THE TRAVAIL OF HIS SOUL, AND BE SATISFIED."

"How unsearchable are God's judgments and His ways past finding out!"

The Psalms

The Psalms are much more than the emotional outpourings of a human mind. They speak freely and surely of prophecy and eternity, and the deep original causes and purposes which only the Spirit knows. They portray the development of the mind and character of the multitudinous Christ, centering particularly in the training and perfecting of its glorious head. The Psalms fill in the gaps and omissions of the Gospels. They take us behind the scenes, and give us an inner view of the Gospel picture. In them we are with Christ during those years when he was hid from the world, and during those hours when He was alone with the Father.

"His delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night" (Psa. 1:2).

This is the godly man. The fact that such a character seems extreme and unattainable is illustrative of the depravity of the flesh, and its deceptive ability to present its own deformity and illness as the standard of health. But *this* is the true standard—anything less is a diseased condition.

This ideal character, the godly man, appears throughout all the Psalms, weaving them into an epic of the perfect fulfillment of man's destiny.

"The Lord hath set apart him that is godly for Himself" (Psa. 4:3).

The world rushes by and around him, but it all has the unreal atmosphere of a dream. God has called him aside out of the throng into the quiet sanctuary of divine favor, and has shown him the plans for the eternal building that is to be erected on the site of all the present purposeless bustle and strife.

For peace of mind, and for the single-minded and effectual accomplishment of the work to which he is divinely appointed, the godly man does well to remember that he has been set apart. But still, he is not a cold, unfeeling spectator, hardly regarding the world's troubles and, like Jonah, impatient for its destruction. Repeatedly we are told that Christ was moved with compassion for the vast droves of shepherdless sheep and was never far away from tears when he contemplated the benighted misery of the world, but still . . .

"Thou hast put gladness in my heart" (Psa. 4:7).

Gladness is our true foundation. The deepest layer of the life of the righteous is pure gladness. Underneath and surround-

ing the transient sorrows of the present, God has put an all-embracing gladness in his heart. It is not a shallow gladness that ignores sorrow, but one that sees through and beyond it. This is real. All else is passing. This is God's gift of peace in the midst of storm—received and enjoyed in direct proportion as it is perceived and drawn upon.

> *"Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength"* (Psa. 8:2).

The weak things of the world are used to carry on God's mighty purpose and confound the wise. *"I thank thee, Father; Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto the babes."* The last shall be first, the weak shall be strong, the abased shall be exalted, the poor shall be rich. Is it that God just set out deliberately to reverse every human trend or value, or is it that all man's views and standards are in direct and presumptuous defiance of eternal reality and truth? Can it be possible for proud, self-satisfied man to be consistently wrong? *"That which is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God."* And to our minds comes that vicious parade of selfish virtues and glorified vices that comprise the philosophy of the natural brute beast called man. Let us distrust every natural thought and inclination.

"What is man, that Thou are mindful of him?" asks the Psalmist (v. 4) contemplating this sad spectacle. Then, illustrating the rich inter-weavings of the mind of the Spirit, Paul takes up this very passage and focuses it on THE Man, Christ: *"Thou has made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor . . . O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is Thy Name!"* Thus is man brought from the depths. But so few rise to the call of this glorious destiny.

> *"The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside"* (Psa. 14:2).

Many wonder about the countless millions that come and go entirely outside the scope of God's plan, but God has looked them all over. The material that God desires is very rare—almost non-existent—true humility that seeks God's will in all things, and has no ideas of its own. Man's major problem is to get his estimation of himself and his own ideas down to its true level of utter insignificance. Then he will not wonder why God

can find no use for so many creatures like him, but he will bend every effort to make himself of some value to God.

Psalm 15 gives eleven points which mark the man that God can use.

Among them—

"He that sweareth to his own hurt and changeth not" (v. 4).

There are few tests of character more decisive, especially in *little* things. There are many things that seem too small to make it necessary to be careful to adhere to principles; little infractions that we can laugh off, or dismiss lightly.

"He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful in much: he that is unjust in the least is unjust in much."

If we are unfaithful in little things, then we can be sure that our faithfulness in big things has no sound basis, but is merely the result of fear, necessity, or pride.

In any accepted benefit, there is an implied covenant. The limitations of our circumstances may confine the return to simple thanksgiving, but usually there is much more to be done. The person who fails to realize this—that whenever he accepts, he is obliged to give—has not learned the first law of the spirit of life. The life of Christ was in its entirety a complete and continual giving, and it was the only perfect life. He came not to be ministered unto, but to minister—not to get, but to give—not to accumulate, but to distribute. He fully realized the implications of the everlasting covenant.

"He that doeth these things shall never be moved" (Psa. 15:5).

What is it that moves us when others find fault? It is the half-conscious fear that somewhere we have lost contact with the mind of the spirit and the fault-finder may have some ground of fact at the bottom of the grievance he has built up. And in God's wise provision for the mortification of the flesh, we usually find that to a larger or smaller degree this is true. Rarely, if ever, are we permitted to enjoy the sweet but dangerous gratification of having been entirely right.

"The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance" (Psa. 16:5).

The mind that has fully grasped this has solved all problems and achieved perfect peace. All fear is removed and all desire is satisfied. Verse 11, *"In thy presence is fullness of joy."* How remote, and ineffectual, are the vain chatterings and clamourings of men!

"Men of the world, which have their portion in this life" (Psa. 17:14).

David was king of a prosperous and successful nation. He subdued all his enemies round about, and enjoyed all the power and wealth and respect that natural man could wish. But he was never a *"man of the world having his portion in this life."* God was too real to him. He was too simple and genuine and unaffectedly humble. Weak though he was, these were the basic qualities of his heart, and he was chosen as the most suitable medium for the recording of the Psalms. They are far more than David's thoughts, but David was the one whose mind was most in tune with them.

He says in the next verse—

"As for me, I will behold Thy face in righteousness, I shall be satisfied when I awake with Thy likeness . . . The LORD is my portion."

Many of the holy garments portrayed in the Psalms are far too large to fit David, but David, more than any other, burned with a realization of the infinite desirability of the full stature of the perfect man in Christ Jesus. *"I shall be satisfied when I awake with Thy likeness."*

Psalm 18 is majestic and warlike throughout. Its theme is vengeance and victory. All the destructive elements of nature are marshalled on the side of omnipotence, but right in the midst of it we read (v. 55), *"Thy gentleness hath made me great."* The destructive power is the outer shell. The Lord is not in the whirlwind, the earthquake, or the fire. These are but the passing manifestations of His fury, which endures but for a moment; but the still small voice of gentleness remains. Whirlwind and earthquake and fire—those mighty evidences of power—can pull down, and purify, and destroy, but gentleness alone can build and make great.

"The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple" (Psa. 19:7).

God does not attempt to give wisdom to the wise. That is too hard a task even for God. To recognize our simplicity and distrust our wisdom is the first step toward knowledge.

The 22nd Psalm stands apart. The opening words, which Jesus uttered on the cross, are no puzzle to those who know the Psalms. *"Why hast Thou forsaken me?"* This thought is not an uncommon one. We find several Psalms *beginning* with this sentiment, but we do not find them *ending* with it. Consider the end of this one—

"He hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, neither hath He hid His face from him, but when he cried unto Him, He heard . . . All the ends of the world shall turn unto the Lord" (v. 24).

Christ only quoted the opening words, but the whole Psalm would be vividly before his mind, for it is clear that it was written expressly for that very occasion.

"They pierced my hands and my feet" (v. 16).

"They parted my garments among them" (v. 18).

Then the familiar 23rd Psalm, verse 3, *"He restoreth my soul."* What does this mean, and how is it done? It is that process which clears and renews the perception and shrinks the present back into its proper dimensions. It consists of having certain things passed through the mind in orderly procession until the lurking shadows are removed, and the true relations of present and future are perceived. It would not matter how deep the pit were if, like Jacob, we could perceive a ladder reaching from it to the safe haven of God, peopled by His messengers sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation.

The preceding Psalm is an example. The first verse prepared Christ for what was coming, and told him that it was all foreseen. Specific details of the occasion confirm the application. Then assurance is given that God is never heedless or unmindful of those in affliction, and finally the ladder leads the mind right to the final glorious consummation, linking the sorrows of the present into a continuous chain with the pleasures of eternity. So the soul is restored and takes up the journey again with the renewed vigour and courage. It is often the harshness of man that drives the soul to seek and find this comfort from God.

"The meek will He teach His way" (Psa. 25:9).

Meekness opens the gates to communion with God. God will not transmit wisdom through any other medium. *"To this man will I look . . . him who is of a humble and contrite spirit."* And it shuts the gates in the opposite direction. It is difficult to hurt a meek man. Arrows bounce harmlessly off the armor of his meekness. The proud is covered with exposed and tender susceptibilities, but the meek man knows none of these miseries.

"All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth UNTO SUCH AS KEEP HIS COVENANTS AND HIS TESTIMONIES" (Psa. 25:10).

We unconsciously tend to absorb from those around us dangerous conceptions concerning the indiscriminate opera-

tion of God's mercy. God said, *"I will have mercy ON WHOM I WILL HAVE MERCY. Great is His mercy TOWARD THEM THAT FEAR HIM."* And those that fear the Lord are specifically defined in Psalm 112:1, as *"those that DELIGHT GREATLY in His commandments."* Not just delighting in His Word, but delighting in the actual application of it to their lives.

Every effect has a cause. All things operate by law, and the Scriptures teach us that the mercy of God is no exception. He is not a God of chance or caprice. For those who bend every effort to carefully learn and obey God's commands as the first concern of life, His mercy will have no limits; but for those who in any way presume upon their position, or ignore His instructions in any respect, mercy does not enter the picture.

If we delight greatly in a commandment, it ceases to be a commandment, and becomes a loving expression of communion and desire. This is the perfect law of liberty—the ultimate perfect merging of duty and desire. Law, we are told, is not for the righteous, but for the disobedient. Love eventually absorbs all law, as it does all fear, by removing all cause and necessity for it. Thus in the very process of abolishing the law, we establish it. The law is the form into which the character is poured. The form is soon removed, but the fixed character remains as an eternal monument to it.

> *"When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell." "Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord"* (Psa. 27:2; 2 Chr. 20:17).

Sometimes patience and faith must bridge a great gulf between the two parts of this verse, but for the godly man the immutability of the basic principle is assured. The worst of storms will finally blow itself out and leave the man of God unharmed.

> *"One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in His temple"* (v. 4).

One thing. One thing is needful. Complication is unrest, but simplification is peace. One thing in life must stand in majestic isolation like the mountain of the Lord, and all other things must be grouped in complete subjection at its base.

> *"Wait on the Lord"* (v. 14).

We have ample instruction that we must be diligent and redeem the time, but in many problems waiting on the Lord is

the best solution. God is in complete control; we are merely servants. We have many specific duties and responsibilities, but even in the discharge of these, waiting on the Lord plays no small part. The question, *"Who shall roll away the stone?"* often occasions needless care. Much of it rises from our failure to recognize our own insignificance in relation to God's great work. God is primarily testing and preparing us, not coming to us for help. Our task is confined to doing our own small part as it comes to us, in a manner pleasing to God.

All the planning and engineering we can safely leave to Him.

"HE is the saving strength of His anointed" (Psa. 28:8).

Was Christ different from us? God was his strength and his salvation. He had none other—nothing in himself; nor have we. He was the perfect man because he was the perfect manifestation of man's helplessness and God's perfection.

"Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness" (Psa. 29:2).

Beauty is that attribute which gives pleasure simply by its existence, that which embodies in itself its own reason for being. This is the ultimate state of the redeemed. Beauty is perfection of form or quality. Holiness, or divine eternal perfection is the only true beauty.

"Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (Psa. 30:5).

The weeping of the night is essential to the perfection of the morning's joy. Knowledge of good and evil have always been inseparably linked, right from the Garden of Eden. The weeping of the night, once it is over, will be a highly valued memory. Its actual sorrows will have left the mind, but its beneficial effect will be eternal. Nothing is unnecessary in the working of God's purpose.

"Fret not thyself because of evildoers" (Psa. 37:1).

It is natural to fret, but only because the whole picture is not kept in mind. It is no part of the necessary sorrows of the righteous to fret about evildoers, or about the multitude of abuses and inequalities evildoers impose upon each other. The state of the world, local and international, is a matter of interest, but not of concern. Prices, wages, and social injustices are no personal anxiety of the man of God. He has been assured sustenance, and he desires no more. God's power is not shortened. Who comes out victor in the bitter political and industrial strivings of the potsherds of the earth cannot affect God's tender care for His children.

Continuing this thought —

"Surely every man walketh in a vain show; surely they are disquieted in vain; he heapeth up and knoweth not who shall gather it" (Psa. 39:6).

Three thousand years have not changed the picture. Man is still disquieted in vain. How futile and pitiful must man seem to God! And we all claim to know better; we are often careful and troubled about such little things. We sing, "Oh how love I Thy law, it is my study all the day." Surely if this is to be more than a pious exaggeration, it must fill our minds and eliminate our petty disquietude, and lead us to say . . .

"Why art thou cast down, O my soul?" (Psa. 43:5)

Here is spiritual wisdom reasoning with natural feeling. It is much more easy and natural to follow and be affected by feeling than reason. But wisdom here calls attention to all the blessings and promises of God, present and future, and urges the inescapable conclusion that only hope and joy and praise are in order among the company of God's elect, therefore . . .

"Sing ye praises WITH UNDERSTANDING" (Psa. 47:7).

This is the whole spirit of the book of Psalms. Praise is its form, understanding its outstanding characteristic. The Psalms speak with certainty and wisdom, upon every phase of divine purpose and human welfare, and they turn every aspect into praise and glorification of God. Understanding and praise go hand in hand. In Psalm 33 it is recorded *"Praise is comely for the upright."* All the activities of the upright should be directed toward the praise of God, in word and deed. Activities which do not measure up to this standard are uncomely and out of place.

To worship in holiness, and to praise with understanding, comprise the highest destiny and joy to which man can aspire. The whole Scripture is necessary to teach both the holiness and the understanding, but in the developing and expressing of them in the form and spirit of worship and praise, the Psalms are pre-eminent.

And in the heart of every Psalm, lifting it out of the realm of the ideal and impossible into the practical and attainable, we see that one man in whom all the strength and salvation of God centered: *"In the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do Thy will, O my God."*

My Sin Is Ever Before Me

"Wash me throughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. Make me to hear joy and gladness, that the bones which Thou hast broken may rejoice" (Psa. 51:8).

THE FAILURES AND SUCCESSES OF THE MAN AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART

Our thoughts this morning concern sin. The present is a dispensation of sin. Anything contrary to God's will, or anything out of harmony with His perfect holiness and purity, is sin.

We are here this morning because of sin. The love and sacrifice we commemorate was because of sin—the great Sin Offering—the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. We have read together 2nd Samuel 24. It tells us of David's sin in numbering Israel. Why was it sin just to take a census? Because it was of the flesh and contrary to the will of God.

"God moved David to number Israel" (v. 1).

There is much to be learned from this. God did not *tempt* David, nor move him against his own inclination. How then did He "move" him to do what otherwise he possibly would not have done?

Here lies the deep lesson. If we toy with sin, if we allow our minds to dwell on the desire for that which is sinful, then God may judicially contrive that our footing may give way, and we may find it impossible to scramble back to safety. God is not mocked. He knows the hearts, and He typically causes the sinner to punish himself.

If we choose evil, even in a small degree, God can and well may *blind* and confuse us that we go deeper and deeper into the evil, for our own fitting punishment and training, as when Israel lusted for flesh, and God gave them flesh until it nauseated them and caused a plague, and thousands died, and the place was called *the Graves of Lust.*

This is doubtless the explanation of many of the apparently inexplicable and stupid sins that men stumble into to their own distress. There is no more fitting punishment than to be forced to accept in full and sickening abundance that which we planned to just dabble lightly with, and then pull back—

"As a man sows, so shall he reap."

If only we had the plain, simple common-sense to really *believe* it!

If we have any part in God's purpose at all, then whatever we do wrong, be it large or small, we shall inevitably pay for it in some very unpleasant and appropriate way, usually—as we see in David's case—in the way that hurts us most, and that mocks us with our sin.

Joab was very strongly against the numbering. This was one time where, strangely, the fleshly Joab was right, and the godly David was wrong. We can at times learn wisdom from anyone, however more spiritually-minded than they we think ourselves to be. The practical Joab could see no sense in sinning *unnecessarily*, with no gain from it.

The result was the most destructive plague ever visited on Israel: 70,000 died. But it is beautifully appropriate, and fully in harmony with the deep wisdom of the ways of God, that this sin is made the foundation of future blessing, and is turned into a stepping-stone in the eternal purpose of God.

The scene of the plague, in God's marvelous transmutation, becomes the scene of forgiveness and mercy. The plague was halted when the avenging angel was at the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite, about to destroy the city. David, in thanksgiving and for an atoning sacrifice of reconciliation, bought the threshing-floor, built an altar, and offered a burnt offering. And God answered by fire from heaven, and the plague was stayed.

This, by all-foreseeing divine providence, happened to be on Mt. Moriah, where Abraham had typically offered his only son, where the Temple was later built, and finally where the one great sacrificial offering for all time was made, that was to halt the raging plague of sin and death, and deliver the Holy City. In the fulness of the appointed time of God's wisdom and purpose, the avenging Death-Angel's hand was turned back, on behalf of all mankind. David said on this occasion—

> *"This is the House of the Lord God, and this is the altar of the burnt offering for Israel"* (1 Chr. 22:1).

And consequently we read (2 Chr. 3:1)—

> *"Then Solomon began to build the House of the Lord at Jerusalem in Mt. Moriah . . . in the place David had prepared in the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite."*

* * *

David was a "man after God's Own heart"—a major element of His eternal purpose. Therefore we see the same merciful pattern—divine good out of human evil—in David's other and greater sin, but at terrible cost in suffering and sorrow.

The usual, natural reaction to David's great sin with Bathsheba is that we "just cannot understand how David could do such a thing." Whenever there is anything in Scripture we "cannot understand," it should flash a warning: *why* cannot we understand? Wherein have we failed in preparing ourselves to understand? Let us in humility examine ourselves and confess our fleshly inadequacies, and not unconsciously assume that our natural capacity to understand is the ultimate standard of judgment.

Paul bluntly told the Hebrew and Corinthian brethren and sisters that there were marvels and glories and beauties and mysteries of God and the Scriptures that he longed to impart to them for their joy and upbuilding, and their deeper and richer communion together—but that they were utterly incapable of comprehending them. Because of lazy spiritual slothfulness, they were dull of understanding; they were mentally retarded in spiritual things (1 Cor. 3:1-3; Heb. 7:11-14).

When they, through ample opportunity, should have been teaching these deep things to others, they were—because of sloth and negligence—needing to be retaught the first principles themselves. Instead of giving their whole life and energy to divine things as commanded, they gave them to present things; saying of the wonders of God's Word: "It is too deep for us" (meaning, rather, "We are too shallow for it").

Our natural shallow reaction that we "just cannot understand how David could do such a thing" should open our eyes to many things. It should show us that *we have much to learn,* and perhaps vital to our salvation. If we understood sin and human nature as God understands it, we could clearly understand all instances of sin, and we would be wiser and sadder men.

"We just cannot understand how David could do that!" This is a usually a *moral judgment,* also. Translated into what we really mean, we are saying: "*I* could *never* do such a thing! It is unthinkable!" This is what Peter said: "*I* could NEVER deny thee!" We loudly proclaim our pious shock, which is just a backhanded way of giving ourselves a lift in self-esteem. It's unconscious self-glorification.

Perhaps it would be more profitable to turn the light inward on ourselves: *why* cannot we "understand" how poor weak human beings can grievously stumble? Are *we* so perfect? Our difficulty—our marvel—should be to understand the great-

ness of God's mercy and patience and love toward constantly-erring man.

But our unconsciously self-satisfied inability to understand the great sin of David—while partly due doubtless to the physical limits of our basic understanding capacity—is principally due to our need for learning and instruction from the Word of God. The more we understand the Word, its message of sin and righteousness, of death and life, then the more our shallow "cannot understand" will change from self-congratulation to a humble, sympathetic fellowship with David in his weakness.

Can we understand why the mighty, fearless Elijah should suddenly flee for his life? Why the great John the Baptist should question and doubt? Why James and John should seek the pre-eminence? And why Peter should curse and swear and deny?

We must look upon David's great sin—as upon the trials of Job, and indeed as upon all the sufferings of Christ—as the necessary fire of affliction to develop them to the highest beauty in God's sight.

We cannot begin to compare ourselves with Job and David—rare giants in the eternal purpose of God—but in our small way we can learn from their experiences the basic lessons of godliness. Job, when his trial was over said "I abhor myself in dust and ashes." So did David.

Sin permeates the constitution of all mankind. It must be burnt out by suffering. And the greater the man, the greater the required suffering—and the greater the resultant beauty of the vessel for God.

David's great sin, and also his lesser ones, were necessary to his development. He had weaknesses to overcome by bitter experience. He had to be tried to the utmost, to learn his own weaknesses, and the mighty power and terrible evil of sin. He had to be taught, by the bitterest experiences, that man—however noble, however capable, however devoted to God, however blessed and used in the purpose of God—is still a very weak, flimsy, erring, precarious creature of flesh, laden with the latent leprosy of sin.

To him was the great promise that the Savior of mankind should come from his loins, and be known for eternity as *his* Son. And looking back at his incredible record of faith and courage and suffering, and patience and kindness to his enemies, and his tremendous accomplishments for God in war

and government and music and praise, he could almost be entitled to feel that he had *earned* this high distinction in the purpose of God.

And in a limited sense—in a relative, comparative sense—he had. He alone, a boy, had stood in perfect faith when all Israel's mighty men had cowered and trembled before the huge man of the flesh. And from that point on he had served God with unswerving devotion and preeminent distinction; and had been made the medium of the Spirit's deepest and most beautiful songs of praise and holiness.

But he must learn to the fullest and bitterest depths and natural depravity and deceptiveness of the human heart, the great need for that Savior who, by the grace of God, was to come through him—not only to eternally establish his (David's) kingdom, but to conquer and destroy his sin, and the sin that lies at the root of all mankind's sorrow and suffering and evil.

David was not *caused* to sin—either in the numbering or in the case of Bathsheba. But he was *permitted* to sin. He was put in a position where his weakness would be exposed and tested. God could again have sent an Abigail to stop him, if He had so chosen, but this time he was allowed to fall.

Comparing himself with all around him—his faith, his accomplishments, his sufferings, his fortitude and obedience under the extremities of totally unjust persecution by the king and people he had selflessly served; and then his great public honor and recognition by God—he could well feel natural confidence, even complacency, as he settled into his later years; could easily be tempted to relax his guard against the untiring assaults and subtle deceptiveness of sin.

A balance was needed; a thorn in the flesh; something to ever remind him of the pitiful weakness and insecurity of the best and strongest of human nature. This sin changed the whole course and pattern of David's subsequent life, both internally within himself, and externally in his experiences and circumstances—

> *"My sin is ever before me . . . The sword shall never depart from thine house."*

For the eternal future, this bitter experience of failure was a vital stepping stone to greater perfection of character. For the present, it was the end of all joy and comfort and satisfaction in natural things—

> *"The sword shall never depart": Tamar, Amnon, Absalom, Adonijah: on and on and on.*

David's sins tied his hands in dealing with the sins of others, as he had responsibility to do. This is one of sin's worst aspects: it is self-breeding. It hurts others in a continuing chain. He could not deal properly with Amnon, or Absalom, or Shimei, or Joab. How could he punish his sons for what he knew were judgments on his own sin?

David's secret sin is recorded in full sordid detail for all future generations of sinners to leer and mock at. It was necessary in God's purpose and wisdom that it be so. The great men of God in Scripture lived out for us the realities of life, in both strengths and weaknesses. And all is recorded without concealment or modification, that we may be inspired by the strengths and warned by the weaknesses.

The point is not: How could such a man do such a thing? The point is: *If* such a man *could* do such a thing, how vigilant must *we* be to constantly strengthen our defenses against the deceptiveness of sin. Jesus said to Peter—

"Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation"

—and Jesus himself, strong as he was, constantly followed this course. But Peter did not see the urgent need. He overestimated himself. "I could never do that!" David may have done the same.

Contemplation of David's sin should carry us deeper and deeper into a comprehension of the hopeless sinfulness of all mankind, and the wonderful wisdom and love of God in the plan of redemption whereby man is—all at the same time—purified, humbled, glorified, and filled with the effulgence of thanksgiving and reciprocal love. That love is in proportion to our recognition of forgiveness—

"To whom much is forgiven, the same loveth much" (Lk. 7:47).

Then we shall more and more understand how it could happen to such a man, and we shall feel a deep fellowfeeling with him in it all, and we shall be increasingly kind and compassionate and understanding to the sins and failures and weaknesses of all.

We shall not increase our tolerance toward sin. Much the reverse. We shall more and more realize its terrible, destructive evil power; we shall recognize it more and more as the great, common, implacable enemy of us all. And we shall perceive that if a man is sincerely struggling against it, only God can judge the seriousness of his failures, and the victory

of his successes. And the more concerned and anxious we shall be, by prayer and study, to fortify ourselves—

"Watch and pray, lest YE enter into temptation."

We say this was a terrible sin—a major sin. When is a sin large or small? Who is to say? Any sin is sin. Any conscious, deliberate sin, even the most trivial, is a complete break in our lifeline of love that unites us to God, and upon which everything depends.

The magnitude of a sin is no direct measure of the heart, or of a man's relative wickedness. A small, mean sin, done consciously and deliberately, and brushed off with a belittling of its seriousness, and with excuses and self-justification when pointed out—can reveal a far more sordid and poverty-stricken state of heart than a great failure that is sincerely and bitterly and openly repented of.

We cannot judge degrees of guilt, or magnitudes of sin. We do not know how severely God is testing a man, or what great work God is preparing him for. We can, and must, determine between factual right and wrong. And we must follow the scripturally-required course in relation to it. But we cannot judge or condemn, we cannot discern motives, or relative degrees of guilt. That is God's prerogative.

It is quite likely, and far more in keeping with his character, that David had no intention of going as far a adultery when he first sent for Bathsheba to visit him. The deadly, downward course had begun, and God was watching and controlling. But David, presuming on his own strength and goodness, *may* have intended to go only so far.

There is much greater pertinence and significance in the lesson for us if it were a matter of presumption on his strength, and of foolish playing with fire, rather than the cold, deliberate, premeditated commission of a vile and despicable sin. Surely few, if any, claiming to be Christ's brethren would deliberately set out to commit a deadly sin. But *any* could very easily be trapped in a self-made net that began with a very small act of folly.

David doubtless repented, or thought he repented, of the adultery into which he had stumbled. But it is clear that he must have had a completely perverted and self-justifying concept of the sordid sequence of events that followed, as he struggled to break out of the net that was gradually tightening upon him.

David's whole motive in the subsequent terrible chain of events *may* have sincerely been to save Bathsheba from shame and Uriah from sorrow—or he may have convinced himself that was his motive.

Or he may have, in his heart, excused himself by blaming Bathsheba, as Adam blamed Eve. And it is quite conceivable that in the development of the events, there was some justification for him so doing, though we have no reason to assume so. Clearly the *responsibility* was David's. He was the one exclusively called to account and judged.

David was not a deliberate hypocrite. This is the least possible thing we could believe. *Somehow* he was able to square his conscience. He had to have some way of living with himself for that long, dark year before he was exposed. Here is the deceitfulness of sin. It may have been a combination of self-deception on his part with judicial blinding on God's part. And the more time passed without anything terrible happening, or any condemnation from God, the more his conscience would be lulled, and his self-justification confirmed.

But the day of account, though long delayed, came inexorably at last, just as it always does, and always will.

* * *

Whenever we consider David's sin, we must keep the whole picture of his life in true balance and perspective. It is a glorious picture of a "man after God's Own heart." Habitual uprightness, service, zeal, faith, occasional failings, intense repentance. His subjection to temptation gives more meaning to his tremendous record of faith, for he was a weak mortal man, just like us.

Patiently he submitted for weary years to Saul's wicked and ungrateful persecution. He never fought back. He always left the issue in God's hands, content to wait God's good time. God had appointed Saul, and he was the "Lord's anointed." Even in the extremity of self-defense against murderous persecution, he would not harm him.

In assessing David's life, let us try to picture and realize the perils and hardships he endured. During his twenties, when he was hardly yet a man, he was hunted and chased like a criminal from place to place for a period of several years, never knowing where to go or whom to trust, with wives and children to care for, and six hundred very difficult and quarrelsome men, with their families, to provide for.

David was a giant, one of the few really great men of all history. He was great in both strength and sweetness, in physical courage, and in spiritual discernment, poetry, music, and psalms.

David *is* The Psalms, and The Psalms are David. David was privileged to write the songs of praise for the people of God for the whole 3,000-year period from his day to the establishment of the Kingdom, and doubtless for the endless ages beyond. Truly the Psalms are prophetically and inspirationally the mind of the Spirit of Christ, but David's own heart and mind were the Spirit's chosen medium.

David is pre-eminently the "sweet Psalmist of Israel"—Israel both natural and spiritual. Clearly the great love and ambition of David's life was the pure service and worship of the God of Israel. He found that worship broken down, scattered, almost non-existent: the neglected Tabernacle in one obscure place, the forgotten Ark in another.

He left it firmly established and thoroughly arranged in careful, organized depth and detail: with a numerous and orderly course of priests, singers and Levites; the Ark brought lovingly to a place of honor at Jerusalem; a magnificent Temple completely planned and designed; and a vast wealth of materials for it assembled. And it would have been built too, if God had permitted him.

The spirit of David was the spirit of song: of praise, worship, supplication, prayer, thanksgiving, adoration. This was his greatest gift to his generation, and to all subsequent generations of the sons of God. The Psalms of David have ever been the cherished Hymnal of God's people. They express all the joys and sufferings, hopes and fears, praises and supplications, of the children of God of all time.

The Psalms would lose much beauty and power and value for us without the deep spirit of repentance and supplication, and joy in forgiveness and reconciliation, that David's bitter experiences added to them.

David gave life and power to the worship of God in Israel by giving it song. He gave Israel all the necessary exterior framework for faithfulness and inspiration and unity and holiness. We cannot help but think of bro. Roberts' similar vast labors and accomplishments for the people of God in these last days, now all but forgotten in many quarters. And the preparation of our Hymn Book, containing fifty of the Psalms, is one of the

most powerful works bro. Roberts did for the Truth and the Brotherhood.

The national provision David set up, the splendid Temple and the impressive worship and service, failed for the majority, and failed soon and miserably. But this has not lessened its value and power for the remnant of grace that has always existed through the ages. In the providence of God, no one can take from His children the priceless treasure of the Psalms of David.

If we would understand the sad sins of David, their bitter consequences and their glorious aftermath; if we would truly learn their deep lessons for sinners everywhere—let us read and read and reread the Psalms. We have no right to attempt any conclusions concerning David without taking his Psalms fully into account. Here he states his case and bares his heart in terms that should put us all to shame. Let us get the spirit of David, which is the Spirit of Christ—

"O how love I Thy law! It is my meditation all the day" (119:97).

"My heart and my flesh cry out for the Living God" (84:2).

"My soul thirsteth for Thee: my flesh longeth for Thee" (63:1).

"All my desire is before Thee" (38:9).

"My soul fainteth for the courts of the Lord" (84:2).

"My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments" (119:20).

"One thing have I desired: that I may behold the beauty of the Lord" (27:4).

"With my whole heart have I sought Thee" (119:10).

David's sin manifests the wise and loving working of God—both in the punishment and in the mercy. For His people, God has always combined punishment with hope and reconciliation.

God loved Solomon, and called him Jedidiah, *Beloved of Yahweh,* from the same root as David, *Beloved.* Why, of all David's sons, did God specially choose and love Solomon, son of Bathsheba, apparently the first surviving child of this sin-founded union—choose him for the throne of Israel, as the great royal type of Christ and his Kingdom, and first link in the royal chain to Christ?

We would think it much more in keeping with the principles of holiness to carefully avoid any connection with—and seeming approval of—this questionable union, rooted in sin and

lust, and stained with adultery and murder; and rather choose the next king and subsequent lineage from one of David's legitimate and faithfully-acquired wives. Certainly God had a deep purpose and lesson in this for us. And certainly it was not to condone or belittle the dreadfulness of David's sin, which God terribly condemned and terribly punished.

Perhaps it was another beautiful illustration of the divine principle that if there is true repentance, God will bring good out of the evil, after there has been appropriate punishment, *humbly and faithfully submitted to.* When God must punish heavily, He compensates.

Contrast these two children of Bathsheba. The first manifested His wrath: it must die, because of David's sin. But Solomon it is especially recorded that God *loved,* and personally named him to commemorate that love. Would it not be to show the fullness of God's forgiveness—the fullness of the restored communion and fellowship?

The fellowship of God was the most important thing in the world to David. It was life itself—

"There is none on earth I desire before Thee."

The especial choice and favoring of Solomon would be a gracious and greatly needed gesture of love from God that reconciliation was now complete. As the wise woman of Tekoah said to David, in words that—like Caiaphas—go far beyond the meaning and understanding of the original speaker, even to encompass the whole sweep of God's purpose—

"Neither doth God respect any person: yet doth He devise means that His banished be not expelled from Him."

God hath, in His love, devised the means: and we meet this morning in worshipful commemoration of it. Let us ever thank Him for it—thank Him with the offering He asks: a living sacrifice.

She Openeth Her Mouth With Wisdom

"He that sinneth against Wisdom wrongeth his own soul. All they that hate her love death" (Prov. 8:36).

THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

We are at present reading the Proverbs together—the book of the Spirit—the book of detailed instruction for our daily walk.

As we view the state of the world, in this age of so much cleverness and so little wisdom, so much mechanical accomplishment and so little true living or understanding of life, we are deeply and sadly and thankfully impressed with the crying need for divine guidance and instruction.

The Proverbs, like the rest of Scripture, teach us two basic, elemental lessons upon which all true accomplishment by man must be built—

"It is not in man himself to direct his way aright."

And—

"The fear of God is the BEGINNING of wisdom."

Until by meditation, and experience, and self-examination, we are impressed to the depths of our being with these two cardinal truths, we can make little progress in life.

The great revelation of the Bible is that man is naturally evil and foolish, that God is all wisdom, and that man's wisdom lies in seeking God with the whole being, and learning the teachings of His Word.

The more we see the wise of the world rejecting the eternal Word of God and building on the shifting sands of their own man-made, man-centered philosophies, and the more we observe the tragic results of this in corruption, immorality and violence, the more we are impressed with the infinite value of God's Word, and the infinite superiority of God's Way—the Way of Beauty and Holiness and Truth and Life—as compared with man's natural way of lust, pleasure, emptiness, greed and death.

The spirit of the Proverbs is awe and reverence, and the fullest recognition of man's littleness and weakness. Its lessons are many, but outstanding among them are these eternal truths—

• In the long run, good and prosperity are the destiny of the righteous. Sin and self-pleasing, however temporarily successful, are manifested to be stupidity and self-destruction.

• God's correction indicates His love. Education, discipline, self-restraint in harmony with spiritual law, constitute the way of wisdom and life.

• All mental and physical powers, and all desires and strivings for holiness and spiritual beauty, are the gracious blessings and gifts of a loving Father, and to be joyfully used to His glory.

The Proverbs emphasize—perhaps more than any other book of Scripture—the vital truth that the Gospel of salvation is a WAY OF LIFE. It concerns and must control ALL activities of the mind and body, if it is to mean *anything.*

Being "in the Truth" is infinitely more than just believing a set of doctrines. If our whole life—everything we are or think—is not consciously striving toward ever-increasing harmony with God, we are on the way of death.

One thing is certain: If we truly get the glorious message of Proverbs, if we truly comprehend and appreciate the greatness of God's gracious love toward us, if we truly realize the magnitude and urgency of the joyful work that lays before us, to serve and glorify God and prepare ourselves for His eternal companionship—then we shall never have either the time or inclination to cry or feel sorry for ourselves. We shall be too busy *doing* and *rejoicing.*

TO FEEL SORRY FOR OURSELVES IS A REPROACH AGAINST THE LOVE AND GOODNESS OF GOD. It is shallow, cowardly faithlessness. It cannot be anything but displeasing to Him.

* * *

The Hebrew title of the Book of Proverbs is *Mashal,* meaning "a comparison." The great theme of the Proverbs is the comparison between wisdom and folly, more specifically and pictorially—between the wise man and the fool.

We will have noted that the chapter read this morning (26) says much about the fool and his folly; and the Proverbs—and all Scripture—puts the vast majority of mankind into this pitiful, perishing class.

Wisdom offers life and joy; Folly offers sorrow and death.

Proverbs draw a clear, sharp line that divides all mankind into two distinct classes: the wise and the fools. The dividing line is the reverent fear of God—

"The fear of God is the BEGINNING of wisdom."

All on one side of the line are fools—on the way to death and eternal oblivion, regardless of what their natural fleshly accomplishments may be.

All on the other side of the line are wise—on the way to life, regardless of the limitations of their education or their natural abilities.

The fear of the Lord is the BEGINNING of wisdom. Let us always keep that vividly before our minds.

Is it necessary to study and obey the Proverbs to gain eternal life? Will we fail and be rejected if we do not? In the light of the clear warnings and declarations of Scripture, it would be folly to answer anything but "Yes." The introductory six verses make that clear.

As Psalms reveals and teaches the heart and character of godliness, so Proverbs teaches the mind and conduct. Paul declares—

> *"ALL Scripture is given by inspiration of God . . . that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works"* (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

—and this is a very important and unique part of that Scripture, containing things we cannot learn elsewhere.

* * *

Much of the early part of Proverbs seems to be directed to private and personal chastity.

While this is vitally important, and basic to a life of godliness, and while this matter is the world's besetting evil, and while the Divine commands concerning it require teaching and emphasizing and defending today to a degree we would never have dreamed—even just a generation ago—would ever be necessary in this so-called "Christian" country, still the real lesson and teaching is deeper and broader and higher.

The evil woman to be avoided is Folly personified, just as the wise woman to be sought is Wisdom personified.

* * *

It is remarkably characteristic of Proverbs that there is no reference to the many specific aspects of life under the Law of Moses, as the Sabbath, Tithing, Feasts, Sacrifices, etc.

This is clearly a divine book of instruction for all times, and for all circumstances. Those who do not accept the divine origin of the book cannot see how Israel—so bound by the limited horizons of the Mosaic Law—could produce such a book of instruction in daily walk that takes no special recognition of that Law.

The Proverbs are "dark sayings." They require study—searching out—prayerful meditation, for their understanding; and wisdom and discernment in their application. In today's reading we are told (Prov. 26:7):

"The legs of the lame are not equal: so is a parable in the mouth of fools."

The Proverbs are not for the shallow-minded, nor for superficial study. Again, they themselves tell us in yesterday's readings (25:2)—

"It is the glory of God to conceal a thing":
"But the honor of kings is to search out a matter."

In this connection—in what version should we study them? How can we best get at the original message? In the Authorized Version, or modern ones?

It would be nice to think that there are simple, clear, accurate versions in the normal language of today where we could easily learn the thoughts of the mind of God without having to search and compare.

And truly there are many modern versions that are very easy to read and understand. But are we—in them—understanding the true revelation of the mind of God, or what some man or men think God meant? Sadly we find it is the latter.

The Authorized, or "King James," version truly is far from perfect. Many more and older manuscripts have been found since it was translated. Furthermore, even this version to some extent unavoidably reflects the personal beliefs of the translators.

But it has two basic, vital virtues that no modern version seems to possess, and without which any version is worse than useless—

1. It was translated by men who reverently believed the Bible to be the wholly and divinely-inspired Word of God, and

2. It is truly a respectful TRANSLATION of God's Own Word, and not—like all modern versions—a PARAPHRASE and INTERPRETATION screened through the fallible judgments and opinions of erring men in their own words as to what they think the author (they are not sure who he was) meant to say.

The Revised Version of 1871, and the American Version of 1911, were prepared in the same spirit as the Authorized Version, using material that had become available in the intervening 300 years, bringing the language somewhat up-to-date and correcting minor inaccuracies and inconsistencies.

When we work with these versions, we have the feeling of making direct contact—as close as is possible for those who understand only English—with the actual words of the Spirit. And with the aid of concordances and other helps we are able to check and compare the use of various words as they are used throughout Scripture, for these versions are as far as is possible, true word-for-word translations, with a minimum of man's own presumptuous rewording and interpretation.

But when we read any modern version, we immediately have the feeling of seeing God's Word very vaguely and obscurely and distortedly through a thick blanket of human, usually irreverent interpretation.

Truly, such versions are very smooth and easy and pleasant to read, and simple to understand. They facilely solve all the intricate problems of meaning presented by the heavy and more cumbersome language of the Authorized Version which, being more literal, follows more closely the Hebrew form of thought.

But are we, in the modern versions, .getting the TRUE solutions, or just being sidetracked from them by someone's meaningless and arbitrary simplification of problems we ourselves should be studying and facing and pondering and searching out?

The Word of God demands personal, devoted study—consistent, persevering, time-consuming study. If we do not value it enough to do this, then we do not really love God, or want eternal life.

* * *

The book of Proverbs is divided into more or less distinct parts, which vary in number according to the degree we subdivide it. The simplest and most obvious subdivision, clearly defined in the book, gives four—

The Proverbs of Solomon (1-24).

The Proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah copied out (25-29).

The words of Agur (30).

The words of Lemuel (31).

Who these latter two—Agur and Lemuel—were, we have no way of knowing. They are either symbolic names for Solomon, which seems unlikely and strained, or they are men of whom we know nothing as to time, place, and circumstances. Agur means "collector," and Lemuel, "devoted to God."

Lemuel was a king, so if he was a real person other than Solomon, he must have been a Gentile, for there were no Hebrew kings so named. This would be a fitting conclusion to such a book for all times.

When we think of how Melchizedek, king of Salem in the time of Abraham, so briefly appears and so quickly disappears from the record, and yet is of so great significance in the divine plan, and leaves the indelible mark of the eternal Melchizedek priesthood—when we think of such, we realize how infinitely little we really know of the historical details of the development of God's purpose through the ages.

There is room for Agur and King Lemuel and thousands of others equally distinguished in their day, all of whom some day we hope to meet and know.

* * *

The first parts—chapters 1-24—again divides into three parts—

Chapters 1-9: Introduction—continuous narrative, personally addressed to "My son" in exhortation and in praise of wisdom.

Chapters 10-22: A collection of several hundred separate, unrelated, two-line proverbs.

Chapters 23-24: Conclusion—return to the personal and continuous narrative form.

CHAPTER 1

The first six verses state the purpose of the book. This book is given to us by God to teach us how to conduct ourselves in all daily activities. It is worthy of all the time and effort we can give it.

Our salvation could well depend on how faithfully we seek to learn and absorb and PRACTICE its divine wisdom—

> *"The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel";*
>
> *"To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding":*
>
> *"To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity";*
>
> *"To give subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion";*
>
> *"A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding will attain unto wise counsels":*
>
> *"To understand a proverb, and the interpretation; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings"* (Prov. 1:1-6).

None will attain to the Kingdom of God who have not done ALL they can to prepare and qualify themselves for it. This, and this alone, is the only reason we are given the great gift and privilege of life in the first place. We DARE not get sidetracked into anything passing and temporal.

"How can we escape (from sin and death) if we NEGLECT so great salvation?"

Verse 7, which is repeated again at the end of this introductory section (9:10), gives the heart of all the teaching—the great dividing line, the glorious threshold of wisdom—

"The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of knowledge."

Verses 10-19 contain a strong exhortation and warning to keep completely separate from sinners—*not to be drawn into any company that is not godly.*

"He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed" (Prov. 13:20).

Verses 20 to the end, is the appeal of Wisdom to the sons of men to follow the ways of godliness and joy, and a solemn warning against the fatal folly of rejecting God's gracious call.

CHAPTER 2

Chapter 2 begins with an admonition to apply intense and consistent effort to acquire the divine wisdom that leads to life, just as keenly and persistently as men seek for hid treasure.

It promises that those who seek shall be given the great joy and comfort of wisdom from God, that will keep them from the ways of death. The chapter ends with the promise of the Kingdom—

"For the upright shall dwell in the land, and the perfect shall remain in it."

"But the wicked shall be cut off from the earth, and the transgressors shall be rooted out of it."

CHAPTER 3

Chapter 3 is a further powerful exhortation, and proclamation of the beauty and joy of wisdom's way—

"Let not Mercy and Truth forsake thee" (3:3).

This is the heart of the Gospel of Life. We must have, and manifest, both—

Mercy AND Truth;
Love AND Knowledge;
Graciousness AND sound doctrine;
Kindness AND undeviating firmness;

Verses 5-6 re-emphasize the key message of life—

"Trust in the Lord with ALL thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding."

"In ALL thy ways acknowledge Him, and He SHALL direct thy paths."

Let us repeat this over and over to ourselves. And let us really *believe* it.

But it must be ALL—or it will not work.

Verse 11 is quoted by Paul as Scripture, in Heb. 12—

"My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; nor be weary of His correction."

CHAPTER 4

Chapter 4:1-7 is another urgent plea to seek wisdom, summed up in verse 7—

"Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting, get understanding."

Do we fully realize this is addressed to us?—that WE are the ones in urgent need of making the pursuit of life-giving divine wisdom the single concern of our lives?

It is so easy to read all this over and over without ever perceiving its present, direct, and pressing bearing upon OURSELVES. Unless we awake, and make the personal application, all these beautiful, divine words will do nothing for us except to condemn us.

In our natural state we have NO wisdom. In our natural state we are silly, shallow, fleshly, and foolish, like all the rest of mankind, and we STAY that way unless God's Word changes us. God has no use for such. "God hath no pleasure in fools."

Therefore, the Proverbs make repeated, intense efforts to get us to realize the *urgency* of these things—to realize that we have no time to waste, that we must put aside all else and devote ourselves to God's Word and work, that there is no hope or promise for any who neglect this or get sidetracked into the meaningless things of this life.

Verses 14-19: Another warning on association with the ungodly—

"Avoid it; pass not by it; turn from it, and pass away!" (15).

It sounds like someone—seeing a very terrible danger—striving frantically to warn one who is stumbling blindly into it.

Verse 18 is the beautiful and refreshing contrast, that of which surely we all see the joyfulness and desirability—

"The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

Why shouldn't that be us? It very easily *can* be—IF we want it more than anything else, and are prepared to give up everything else for it. It is up to us to decide what we really want.

Is our way of life constantly IMPROVING—constantly getting more godly, deeper in divine wisdom, more and more thankfully joyful, a fuller and fuller sense of purpose and meaning and hope for the future—"SHINING MORE AND MORE unto the perfect day?"

If it is not, we are not really living at all, and—sadder still—we are not in the way of future life. The proverbs agonize to awake us to the wisdom of Wisdom—to the wisdom of dropping everything else and making these things ours, in the so brief time that our little span encompasses.

Verses 20-27: Once again the exhortation to an unswerving devotion to wisdom and uprightness—a straightforward path—a single, all-consuming goal, summed up in verse 25—

> *"Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee."*

The only way to reach our goal of eternal life is to keep the eye ever fixed upon it unswervingly, and continually press forward, as Paul says—

> *"Forgetting the things behind"*

—the things we cast aside when we accept Christ, the advantages and pleasures and honors of the world that Paul rejected and cast aside as *dung*, that he might win Christ—

> *". . . and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus"* (Phil. 3:13-14).

If we allow ourselves to be weighted down and sidetracked by present things, we shall lose the race of life.

CHAPTER 5

The strange woman: while this truly has a literal basis, and is a necessary exhortation because of the natural tendencies and foolishness and lust of the flesh, the principal lesson is broader and deeper.

The strange woman is Folly personified, just as Wisdom is so beautifully personified in chapter 8.

The heart of the warning, on which we should think very deeply, is in verses 11-12—

> *"And thou mourn at the last, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed,"*
>
> *"And say, How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof."*

This time of closing the accounts of life comes inevitably to all, and how unbelievably soon it seems to come!

In youth, life seems to stretch out endlessly before us, with all its glitter and attraction; but how soon it is all over, and wise indeed are they who early face this universal fact!

CHAPTER 6

—becomes more specific as to detail. Verses 1-5 give warning against committing and obligating ourselves. No one can foresee the future. The useful soldier of God is the one unencumbered (2 Tim. 2:4)—

> *"No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life: that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier."*

It is so easy to thoughtlessly put burdens on our backs and ropes around our necks that will hinder us in the way of life. Here is a first principle of wisdom. Here again is the dividing line between fools and wise.

Verses 6-11: An exhortation to diligence and labor—against indolence and slumber. Slumber is more than just lying in bed. It is mental drifting and inactivity—spiritual laziness—natural self-indulgence and self-pleasing (Rom. 13:11-12)—

> *"It is high time to awake out of sleep . . . cast off the works of darkness . . . put on the armor of light."*
>
> *"Many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep"* (1 Cor. 11:30).

And verse 6 of this chapter 6—

> *"Go to the ant, thou sluggard! Consider her ways, and be wise!"*

We are placed here for worthwhile activity and WORK. The purpose of our life is to serve God in joy and enthusiasm to the fullest limit of our mortal powers, as a training for future eternal service in the tireless powers of the divine nature.

This alone is true living. Indolent self-pleasing is death—

> *"She* (or he) *that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth"* (1 Tim. 5:6).

But (1 Cor. 15:58)—

> *"ALWAYS ABOUNDING in the work of the Lord."*

—is the joyful, purposeful, satisfying ideal of true living.

Verses 16-19 give seven basic, fleshly things to avoid if we desire life—things that are an abomination to God. They are—

1. Pride.

2. Falsehood: lying, deception, misrepresentation of any kind.

God demands utter TRUTH in the "inward parts"—rigid integrity in the deepest well-springs of motive and intention—regardless of consequence, which is the very opposite of natural, shifty human nature.

3. Doing anything injurious to others.

4. Planning to do wrong.

Planning sin is in some ways more vicious than the sin itself.

5. Eagerness to seek trouble and think evil.

6. Misrepresenting the motives and actions of others.

And above all—worst of all—

7. Seeking to create discord and conflict among brethren.

What terrible judgment is in store for such! And yet what a common, thoughtless fault it is!

All these things are the natural motions of the flesh, and will manifest themselves naturally in us all, unless honestly faced and rooted out—especially the last.

So much is said with the secret (though never admitted, even to ourself) purpose of causing one person to be estranged from, or offended by, or think less of, another.

This is such an ingrained characteristic of the flesh that we are all guilty. It is so satisfying to the pride of the flesh to criticize and think evil. And this is the crowning abomination in the sight of God, but—"Love covers a multitude of sins."

CHAPTER 7

Chapter 7 is again the parable of the young fool and the strange woman—all the deadly, worldly enticements of folly and sin.

CHAPTER 8

Then chapter 8—the direct and glorious contrast—the personification of Wisdom as the beautiful, faithful, eternal companion and handmaid of God—

"The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His way, before His Works of old" (v. 22).

"When He gave to the sea His decree, that the waters should not pass His commandment":

"When He appointed the foundations of the earth":

"Then was I by Him, as one brought up with Him":

"I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him" (vs. 29-30).

The final verse of chapter 8 expresses a principle that is so simple and obvious and self-evident, and yet so ignored.

If we could only fully receive it as a deep, fixed mainspring of conviction and action, then anything contrary to the will of God would not only be repulsive to us but impossible—

"He that sinneth against me—Divine Wisdom—wrongeth his own soul. ALL THEY THAT HATE ME LOVE DEATH."

CHAPTER 9

Chapter 9 concludes this introduction of strong personal exhortation and warning, and again repeats life's cardinal principle—

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the Holy is understanding" (v. 10).

CHAPTERS 10-24

Chapter 10 begins the actual Proverbs themselves, with the introduction in verse 1, "The Proverbs of Solomon." Each verse is a separate thought in two parts—either a contrast or an amplification. This continues through 22:16.

When we read the Proverbs, we should pause and take them one by one. It is not a reading that can be read as a narrative. It is worse than useless to just skim through them, because we are just going through a form of meaningless, self-satisfying motions, deceiving ourselves.

We should seek prayerfully to understand each one, and get its lesson, before passing on to the next. And even more importantly, we should examine ourselves in the light of each—force ourselves to answer specifically: Do we, or do we not, live according to this command of God? And if not, what do we expect at life's end?

We must approach them with an open mind, desiring to learn something new, seeking the wisdom that is from above—casting out our natural "wisdom," the clever, foolish way of the world, and replacing it with the Spirit's real, life-giving wisdom.

* * *

Verse 17 of chapter 22 reverts to the introductory style of continuous, personal exhortation—

"Hear the words of the wise, and apply thine heart unto my knowledge."

Verse 24 is especially striking—

"Make no friendship with an angry man."

Self control is the essence of wisdom. Those who do not intelligently face, and discern, and CONTROL the natural manifestations of their fleshly feelings have never grown up.

They are mentally and spiritually infantile; and are dangerous, undependable, sorrow-bringing companions.

This section, the conclusion of the primary book, continues to the end of chapter 24. Verse 9 of chapter 24 again draws our attention to the basic theme of Proverbs—that SIN IS FOOLISHNESS, AND FOOLISHNESS IS SIN—

"The thought of foolishness is sin."

The Proverbs glorify Wisdom—serious, intelligent, Spirit-guided thoughtfulness and soberness; and constantly warn against, and condemn, the empty, babbling, childish foolishness of the natural mind.

CHAPTERS 25-29

A completely new portion—

"The proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out."

This section—chapters 25-29—is basically similar to the main part of the primary book.

It is very interesting to learn that this was part of the activity of Hezekiah in his desire to serve God and provide guidance for God's people. It fits very well into the picture we are given concerning him; and as a result of his efforts we are blessed with a further revelation of the will of God.

CHAPTER 30

Chapter 30 is by Agur, and is especially outstanding—vivid and animated and expressive throughout. It contains some of the best-remembered proverbs. It is arranged in six sets of fours—

First, the four evil characteristics of the proud and wicked generation (vs. 11-14)—

Despising parents;

Pure and right in their own eyes;

Lifted up with pride and self-esteem;

Voracious and rapacious in their greedy and debased pleasure-seeking.

—so strikingly like Paul's picture of the conditions of the generation of the final Gentile days; and strikingly similar to the conditions we increasingly see around us today.

Then the four things that never say, "It is enough":

—the lesson of the unsatisfiableness of desire;

The four things too wonderful to understand:

—the lesson of the unfathomableness of God's ways;

The four that earth cannot bear:

—the lesson of the repulsiveness of pride;

The four things little and weak, but exceeding wise:

—the lesson of industriousness and prudence, and building on the strength of God;

And the four things that are comely in their going:

—the lesson of the beauty and power of a stedfast and fearless going straight forward in faith.

CHAPTER 31

Chapter 31, the final chapter, is by King Lemuel—the Wisdom that his mother taught him. First, three instructions for kings—

- Give not thy strength unto women;
- It is not for kings to drink wine; and
- Devote yourself to the poor.

—all true and important in their literal application; but clearly, in this final summing up of the book—this divine instruction for kings—the principal meaning is the spiritual.

The warning is for all who hope to be kings of righteousness, against the False Women of the Apostacy, and against folly and Evil in general; and the intoxicating wine of both false doctrine and self-indulgence; and against pride.

As to the devotion to the poor and needy, Paul's words in 1st Corinthians 1:26-28 are clear—

> *"Not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called; but God hath chosen the weak and base and despised."*

And Jesus' words—

> *"He anointed me to preach the Gospel to the POOR."*

A current Canadian school book of history says—

"The earliest conversions were made among the humble and down-trodden—slaves, poor city-workers, women.

"By the second century, Christianity penetrated the middle and upper classes.

"Justin Martyr set about proving Christianity and Greek philosophy were not incompatible."

We know what happened to Christianity after that. There is much food for thought in these quotations and historical facts, and a very sad lesson for today.

* * *

The book of Proverbs closes with the portrayal of the Virtuous Woman, whose price is far above rubies—a beautiful and fitting conclusion to this most unique and remarkable book of divine wisdom.

This final portion is an acrostic of 22 verses, each of which begins with a different Hebrew letter in alphabetical order, like Lamentations, Psalm 119, and other portions of Scripture.

Again, its literal application is truly important, but its application to the glorious Bride of Christ in all her love-inspired virtue and holiness is clear and unmistakable, and as such its lessons and warnings should be carefully studied by all—

"Strength and honor are her clothing, and she shall rejoice in time to come" (v. 25).

As in Psalm 45—

"The King's daughter is all glorious within: her clothing is of wrought gold."

"She openeth her mouth with wisdom, and in her tongue is the law of kindness" (v. 26).

Wisdom and kindness. Let us make sure that ALL we say passes these two divine tests, for otherwise we are not of the Bride of Christ—

"By thy words thou shalt be justified; and by thy words thou shalt be condemned."

"A woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised" (v. 30).

Thus, the book of Proverbs closes as it began—

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

And so closes the other Wisdom book, Ecclesiastes—

"Fear God, and keep His commandments."

"Give her of the fruit of her hands: and let her own works praise her" (v. 31).

The final blessing and reward:

"Behold I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give to every one according as his works shall be."

Come With Me, My Sister-Bride!

"Thou hast ravished my heart, my Sister-Bride: thou hast overcome me with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck."

SONG OF SOLOMON CHAPTER FOUR

This chapter is about Love and Beauty. In fact, this is the subject of the whole Song. These are the qualities that are eternal. Love and Beauty are inseparable, and are essential to each other. There cannot be Love without Beauty. There can, of course, be love in the sense of kindness and compassion and desire to help, but not in the sense of affection and communion and unity of heart.

There can be no true mutual Love without spiritual Beauty on both sides. We speak of course of *spiritual* Love. All that is natural and animal will fade and wither and pass away. That which is spiritual will endure forever: Love and Beauty: Affection and Perfection.

The Song of Songs is unique in Scripture. It portrays Christ's intense, overflowing love for the Ecclesia (and hers for him) expressed intimately in the first person. It is so different from Psalms, which are largely Christ's feelings toward God: his struggles, his overcomings. Some Psalms come close, like Psalm 45, but with far less detail and intimacy—and expressed more distantly in the third person.

The Song expresses Christ's *need* for the Ecclesia: the motivation that his great love for her gives him. Does Christ have need? Does God have need? Are they not perfectly satisfied and self-sufficient? God is love, and the fullness of love requires an object worthy of it.

This is what God is creating, in infinite divine patience, through the travail of the ages. God loves all His creation. Not a sparrow falls unnoticed by Him Who lovingly oversees immensity and eternity. Ninety-nine percent of all the beauty of Creation—even on earth, let alone the vast universe—is for Him alone, and is never seen by human eye. Snowflakes fell in untold myriads of trillions for thousands of years before the microscope revealed to man that each one is a glorious treasure of delicate, intricate beauty. And a snowflake is but for a moment.

But the pure and holy perfection of the Redeemed will be the crowning beauty of all the works of God. The multitudinous

Christ will be the most beautiful of all the beauties of the universe: the richest of eternal beauties, formed out of common clay.

This Song is the Song of Songs: the Supreme Song: the Song of Moses and the Lamb: the Song of the 144,000 on Mt. Zion.

Song—the outbursting and overflowing of rejoicing—is the inevitable product of Beauty and Love. The more we develop these spiritual qualities, the more irresistibly will our hearts be filled with rejoicing and song. This is a marvelous contrivance of Divine Wisdom.

This Song is for teaching *and/or* for comfort. It is to teach us that these two spiritual qualities are what we must devote our lives to developing—

> *"Let us be glad and rejoice . . . the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his Bride hath MADE HERSELF READY"* (Rev. 19:7).

The true Bride *will* have made herself ready. She will conform to the Beauty and Love herein portrayed. There *will* be a ready and prepared Bride, perfect in beauty, without spot or blemish, waiting to welcome her Lord. We see her in this Song being greeted and praised and embraced by the Bridegroom, and invited to be with him for ever.

If we fit into the picture; if we are in full harmony and compliance; if this is where all our heart and interest and labors and efforts center, *then* this Song is for our joy and comfort.

If, however, this is not so, and our minds and time and interests and activities are turned elsewhere, then this Song is for warning and instruction, and not for comfort at all. There is no comfort to be taken unless we are faithfully laboring to the utmost of our ability.

There will be a Bride of perfect Beauty and Love. Whether, in that great Day, *we* are part of that Bride, or part of the vast multitude turned weeping away, depends entirely upon what we devote our life to.

The two characters of this Song are *Solomon*, the Peace-Giver, and *Shulamith*, the Peace-Receiver. Both names are related to Peace. Peace is of one fabric with Love and Beauty. He is the Prince of Peace: that "Peace of God" transcending comprehension (Phil. 4:7); the "Great Peace" that they alone enjoy who manifest in all their lives that they "love His law" (Psa. 119:165); the Peace that none can take from them—*"Peace with God"*: life's ultimate consummation (Rom. 5:1).

The purpose of this Song is to develop the mind of the Spirit. This will not come naturally, however long we are just "in the Truth." It requires intense effort and study and meditation and practice—just like anything worthwhile does. What time and labor and trouble and care people will so eagerly put into getting the things of this life!—and then expect the infinitely *greatest* thing of all to be handed to them without effort. What blind and pitiful folly!

This Song is to show what God requires of us: what the true Bride is, and must be, like. It is, like all Scripture, given—

> *"That the man of God may be perfect; thoroughly furnished unto all good works"* (2 Tim. 3:17).

If we feel we have already reached that point, then perhaps we can afford to give it less than our supreme effort and attention.

Chapter 4 is Christ's description of the Bride. All who fit this picture are of the Bride. All who do not *are not*. This is how he will meet her at the judgment seat:

> *"Come, ye blessed of my Father!"* (Matt. 25:34)

As we examine this chapter, we are impressed with the intense minuteness of the inspection. For the Redeemed, it is a loving inspection that lauds every aspect of beauty, but for the rejected and unworthy it will be very much otherwise.

The Bride is multitudinous. We must bear this in mind. It is addressed to each, individually—but only insofar as they recognize themselves as small parts of a great whole. We must be a unity: a *harmonious*, loving unity. Any lack of love, any petty-minded tendency to carping criticism of our brethren destroys the Beauty and Love, as far as the critic himself is concerned. There will *still* be the Bride, but those who criticize habitually and by nature write themselves off from participation in her beauty. Truly there must be faithful rebuke, *when* faithful rebuke is called for; but it must be by *divine* method and motive. The fleshly critic is outside of both.

> *"Behold thou art fair, my Love, behold thou art fair!"* (v. 1)

Repetition: for surety, and emphasis, and *importance*. "Fair" is archaic English for beautiful. "Love" is *rayah*: fellow, companion, associate, friend—emphasizing unity of mind and purpose and character, for this is absolutely essential in Bride and Bridegroom.

The Bridegroom goes on to praise seven features of the Perfect Bride: eyes, hair, teeth, lips, temples, neck, and breasts.

"Thou hast doves' eyes within thy locks."

This comes first. Eyes are light and understanding, discernment, perception. The dove is the symbol of the Spirit (Jn. 1:32), of purity, gentleness, harmlessness. It was the only sacrificial bird. Here is clarity of spiritual insight; discerning of the Truth; seeing with gentleness and understanding, and sympathetic desire to help and not destroy.

It would appear that "locks" (*tzammah:* "something fastened on") should be "veil": submission and modesty, the opposite of boldness. The Redeemed are represented as a woman, the wife and helpmeet of Christ the Head, because the ideal female characteristics are more suitable to the Redeemed than those of the male.

"Thy hair is as a flock of goats that appear from Mt. Gilead."

As specifically distinguished from the sheep, the goat is waywardness. But of itself, it was a clean and sacrificial animal. Here a flock of glossy, long-haired goats seen descending a hillside is a symbol of beauty and animation, as hair ripples and shines in the light as the head is moved. Long—*not short*—hair is the glory of the female (1 Cor. 11).

Hair, like the veil, is covering and submission: but it is much more. It is personal beauty; it is glory; it is multitudinous unity with the Head. In Samson, it was strength. In the Nazarite, it was separateness and dedication. In the two women who ministered to Christ (Lk. 7:28; Jn. 11:2) it was loving, humble devotion and service.

"Gilead" connotes fruitfulness and health. The name means "heap of witness" (Gen. 31:47). It was a place associated with balm and physicians: healing and ministration (Jer. 8:22).

"Thy teeth are like a flock of sheep that are even shorn, which came up from the washing . . ." (v. 2).

Teeth have both great beauty and great usefulness. They are the aspect of eating the spiritual food that develops the spiritual mind: mastication, assimilation, rumination. Beautiful teeth indicate health, care, wise diet, and cleanliness.

The word "shorn" (*kahtzav*), does not seem exactly correct. It is never so translated elsewhere, and is not the normal word for shorn. A fully shorn sheep does not give the impression of beauty. This word means "formed or cut to uniform shape and size." Its close variant is translated "of one size" as applied to the Cherubim in the Most Holy, and the Temple lavers (1 Kgs. 6:25; 7:37). The idea is uniformity and balance.

The beauty of the Bride is in the balanced evenness of her eating of the Word, and of the balanced result in her character and conduct. How hard it is to keep a proper balance in our studies, in our judgments, in our treatment of others! How rare is balance: how rare is intense zeal without hyper-criticism: how rare is gentle kindness without weakness and compromise! But how important to the Bride's beauty in the eyes of her Lord. It can only come by balanced assimilation of the Word, day in and day out, eschewing crotchets.

The "washing" is quite self-explanatory: washing in the blood of the Lamb, washing by the Word. Cleanliness in every aspect of mind and body is one of the primary and fundamental lessons of the law of God. *"Be ye holy even as I am holy"* is the urgent, constant theme.

> *"... whereof every one bear twins, and none is barren among them."*

The sense seems rather to be—

> *"Whereof every one is twinned, and none is bereaved."*

This word for "twin" (*tah'am*) is rendered "coupled together" of the boards of the Tabernacle (Ex. 26:24); and "barren" (*shakkool*), is always elsewhere translated "bereaved" or "robbed" (Jer. 18:21; Hos. 13:8; etc.).

It seems to further emphasize the balanced *completeness* of the full, even set of teeth: none missing: all perfect pairs. Gaps in the teeth destroy the beauty and unity, and impair the chewing process—denoting wasted time, insufficient attention, and unbalanced, crotchety study.

> *"Thy lips are like a thread of scarlet, and thy speech is comely"* (v. 3).

Here certainly is speech, a very vital aspect of the Beauty—or otherwise—of those who would be the Bride. "Thread" may seem too thin a conception for full, rounded lips of beauty; but the thought seems to be rather the delicate outline of form and shape.

"Scarlet," like the lips themselves, can be used in two very different ways. Scarlet is sin (Isa. 1:18); but throughout the sacrificial ordinances, scarlet is rather salvation from sin by the shedding of blood. Scarlet wool was used in the cleansing of the leper, and in the preparation of the red heifer water of purification (Lev. 14:4, 9; Num. 19:6). And we remember Rahab's "scarlet thread" of salvation (Jam. 2:18).

The mouth is both the primary source of sin, and the means of escape from it—

"With the mouth, confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. 10:10).

"The lips of the righteous feed many" (Prov. 10:21).

"By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Matt. 12:37).

The beautiful mouth of the Bride gives forth only "the law of kindness" (Prov. 31:26), for she is the Virtuous Woman, the Ideal Wife. Criticism is a very easy habit, and it is usually indulged in by those who do *little*, speaking about those who do *much*. It is a miserable device to obscure our own shortcomings.

But the beautiful Bride's speech is "comely," both in content and in manner, for she knows that "*every* idle word" will be called to account at the last great Day, as Christ warns (Matt. 12:36). What a dreadful Day of reckoning we may be preparing for ourselves!

"Thy temples are like a piece of a pomegranate within thy locks (veil)."

The temple is the seat of thought, judgment, character, and resolution. God said He would make Ezekiel's forehead strong against his adversaries (Eze. 3:8). The forehead is where the sealing of God's servants must occur (Rev. 7:3; 22:4)—the transforming of the mind, and the stamping of it with the indelible impress of that which is pure and holy and divine.

The veiled temple is modesty: not bold or brazen. Again, it may be the beauty of the Spirit beneath the veil of the flesh.

Pomegranate is fruit, and it is a very special fruit in the divine imagery: the essence of all fruit. It was on the border of the High Priest's robe (Ex. 39:24), with the golden bells of salvation and praise. And four hundred brazen pomegranates capped the two great pillars of Stability and Strength—*Jachin and Boaz*—at the entrance of the Temple (1 Kgs. 7:42).

Cut through transversely, the pomegranate has twelve sections, arranged around the center like the camps of the twelve Tribes around the Tabernacle. It is full of white, pearl-like seeds in a red fluid, and seems to represent a multitudinous unity purified in the blood of the Lamb.

The eastern pomegranate is light golden brown with a tinge of pink, and would not unfittingly represent the temple of the Bride. But the word "piece" (*pelakh*), which implies "to break, pierce or cut," points rather to the interior of the fruit. At first

consideration, it may not seem appropriate to compare the temple to an opened pomegranate, with its bright red and white; but the thought is not a direct comparison of appearance, but rather the impression of the beauty of the brilliant, jewel-like shining freshness that is revealed within when the pomegranate is opened up.

This is especially fitting in that the temple represents the mind within. Again, reverting to the veil (of the flesh?), the pure white forehead showing through the heavy meshes of a red veil could have the striking appearance of a freshly opened pomegranate.

> *"Thy neck is like the tower of David, builded for an armory"* (v. 4).

The idea is grace and stateliness and firmness and strength: labor and steadfastness in the Truth's warfare: honor, freedom, and joy.

The neck is used in various symbols. A stiff neck is obstinacy; a stretched-forth neck is wantonness; a bowed neck is servitude. To put the neck to the work is zeal and faithful labor, and that is part of the picture here. An erect neck is freedom and joy; and chains about the neck are glory and honor, again parts of this picture. The neck connects the Head to the Body, therefore, above all things, it must be firm and strong like the tower of David.

The word for "armory" (*talpeeyoth*), appears only here, and is given many interpretations. It seems to mean "tall and slender."

> *"Whereon there hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men."*

It was customary to hang rows of brilliantly-polished shields on the central defence tower of a city: often trophies of victory from conquered enemies. From a distance they would appear as chains of gold about a neck. Here is the aspect of both spiritual and actual warfare. *Victory* is the hall-mark of the Bride: it marks her past and her future—

> *"To him that overcometh* (that is, overcometh himself, sin, the flesh) *will I give power over the nations"* (Rev. 2:26).

The victor shall have the victory.

> *"Thy two breasts are like two young roes that are twins, that feed among the lilies"* (v. 5).

The breast is the seat of the emotions. It also represents sustenance and fruitfulness, and nurture and care of the young and helpless. Perhaps maturity, and gentle, concerned,

loving consideration and provision for others, are the principal indications here. And motherhood: the New Jerusalem, mother-city of the Millennium, nurturing all the earth in the law of the Lord. Isaiah's glorious closing picture is—

> *"Rejoice ye with Jerusalem . . . that ye may suck and be satisfied with the breasts of her consolations"* (Isa. 66:10-11).

The two-fold aspect irresistibly points to Jewish and Gentile components of the Bride. In fact, the whole natural body is almost entirely two-fold and symmetrical: though its fundamental unity is emphasized by its most vital elements—the mind and heart—being single. *There must be just one mind and heart in the multitudinous Body.*

Lilies are the Temple flowers, the divine flowers, as pomegranates are the corresponding fruit. Lilies appear to have been purple. The name *(shohshahn)* means "shine," or "to rejoice."

"Roe" is *tzvee.* This same word is usually translated "glory" or "beauty." The animal is apparently so named because of its striking beauty of appearance and motion. It indicates speed and grace and sure-footedness in high places: the army of the Redeemed who will "tread down the wicked" under their hooves, or "straight feet" (Mal. 4:2-3; Eze. 1:7). Roes truly are not warlike animals, but neither is a lamb, symbol of their Commander. These are clean and peaceful animals, warring to establish righteousness and true, permanent peace.

> *"Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, I will get me to the mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense"* (v. 6).

Myrrh is red. It means "bitter." It is medicinal and purifying. It symbolizes sorrow and sacrifice. It was associated with burial. Frankincense is white, and symbolizes prayer and praise.

Christ's custom was to go up at night into a mountain to pray. In its fullness, Calvary and Moriah comprise historically the "mountain of sacrifice and hill of prayer." It was a going up from the valley of the flesh to the mountain top of the Mercy-seat and Shekinah Glory.

> *"Thou art all fair, my Love: there is no spot in thee"* (v. 7).

Are we part of the Bride? Is it our utmost and constant effort to be WORTHY to be so, to the exclusion of everything else? If not, *why not?* Where is wisdom? Where is plain ordinary common sense?

There IS a Bride, and she IS ever *spotless.* She was made white and pure in the blood of the Lamb, and she is kept spotless by dedicated, loving obedience; and striving, and repentance, and prayer. The wise will give their whole lives and energies to *becoming* and *being* part of this glorious and joyous community. That is what manifests that they *are* the wise. All who do not are the foolish.

> *"He sanctifieth and cleanseth it by the washing of water by the Word, that he might present it to himself a glorious Ecclesia, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be HOLY AND WITHOUT BLEMISH"* (Eph. 5:26-27).
>
> *"Keep yourselves in the love of God... Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you FAULTLESS before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy"* (Jude 21-24).
>
> *"Come with me from Lebanon, my Bride, with me from Lebanon"* (v. 8).

Repetition again: sureness and urgency. A new name for the first time in this Song: *My Bride.* And a wonderful, eternal, intimate invitation: *Come with me!*

There are two views of interpretation of this verse. Is it "from" Lebanon, as *away* from something to be abandoned, as the high places of the earth? Or is it, as in the latter part of the verse, "Come *look* from Lebanon": an ascending to, and viewing of, the inheritance?

It would appear to be the latter. Lebanon was part of the promised inheritance. God says—

> *"I will bring them into the land of Gilead and Lebanon"* (Zech. 10:10).

And in two other places in this chapter (vs. 11, 15) Lebanon is spoken of as part of the beauty and the blessing: "the smell of Lebanon," "streams from Lebanon." Lebanon means "white and pure."

> *"Look from Amana* (Truth) *and Shenir* (Light) *and Hermon* (the 'Holy Mount')."

Hermon was almost certainly the "holy mount" (2 Pet. 1:18) of the Transfiguration. In Psalm 133 the "dew of Hermon" is associated with "life for evermore" and unity among brethren. These are the new and purified "high places of the earth" to which the Bride is exalted: the New Heavens.

> *"From the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards."*

These are the former dominions of the evil beast nations, the present Sin-Powers of the world—for ages the ravenous marauders of the earth—but now subdued and pacified under the "straight feet" of the Lamb and the Roes, when the meek inherit the earth. Truly—

"Mt. Zion is more glorious than the mountains of prey" (Psa. 76:2-4).

"The leopard shall lie down with the kid . . . the lion shall eat straw . . . they shall not hurt nor destroy in all My HOLY MOUNTAIN, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (Isa. 11:6-9).

"Thou hast ravished my heart, my Sister-Bride" (v. 9).

Literally, "hearted me"—that is, given me heart, or taken away my heart: probably including both thoughts. Strength of heart and oneness of heart are the basic ideas.

Here is overflowing intensity of affection and emotion of Christ for his brethren and sisters. This is the satisfaction of the travail of his soul (Isa. 53:11); the "joy set before him" for which he endured the suffering and the shame (Heb. 12:2).

It is the Bride's *beauty* that overcomes him. Let us note this well. If there is no beauty, there can be no love. Sympathy, perhaps, and pity, and kindly sorrow for what might have been. But no eternal, spiritual Love. That is only for those who concern themselves *above all else* to develop the Beauty.

Another new name. "Bride" alone is inadequate. Their relationship is far more wonderful and intimate and joyous than any human relationship. "Sister-Bride" approaches closer, for it combines two of the deepest forms of human love. He is not only the strong and glorious Bridegroom: he is the protective, caring Elder Brother.

And elsewhere the Redeemed are called his "children" (Heb. 2:13), and his "seed" (Isa. 53:10)—drawing into the type the beauty and tenderness of a third deep form of human love: a triple bond, a three-fold cord: *Bride, Sister, Daughter.* The same family and background and parentage.

"Thou hast overcome me with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck."

In the fullness of their intimacy and mutual understanding and heart-harmony, the slightest loving movement of eye or head is sufficient to arouse overflowing affection. How little is needed to convey the deepest meaning when heart is wholly knit to heart! *The Bride's beauty overcomes Christ.* Are we part

of the Bride?—the select few chosen from the ages. Do we realize the effort and devotion required?

"How beautiful is thy love, my Sister-Bride: how much better than wine!" (v. 10)

How infinitely more reviving and gladdening and satisfying is the spiritual than the natural! *This* is "pleasure *for evermore*" (Psa. 16:11): no brief, passing, cheating excitement whose tinsel is soon faded and dull, but *eternal permanence*; well worth waiting for.

"And the smell of thine ointments than all spices!"

Ointment in Proverbs (27:9), is the sweet intimate counsel of soul to soul. "Ointment" here is the common word for "oil"—*shemen*—the oil of gladness, of light, of praise, worship and thanksgiving: purifying, healing, dedicating, consecrating. Sacrifice, praise, worship, and thanksgiving are the sweet savors unto God.

"Thy lips drop as the honeycomb" (v. 11).

Her lips always overflow with golden sweetness, *because* that is the pure and serene state of the heart within: kindness, encouragement to others, true spiritual counsel and guidance. We are not appointed judges. We are constantly warned against habitual, unnecessary judging. Truly there are times we must judge, but very humbly and reluctantly—not by steady, thoughtless, unfeeling fleshly habit.

Honey does not just happen effortlessly. It is the precious product of prodigious diligence and labor. A bee travels hundreds and hundreds of miles in its industrious lifetime, just to gather a total of a small spoonful of honey. The bee doesn't *make* the honey. It is the free and gracious gift of God. But the bee has to collect it, and prepare it, and dispense it. It brings no nourishment and sweetness just left in the flower.

"And the smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon."

Aromatic trees abounded in the verdant mountains of Lebanon. God says through Hosea, of these coming, joyful days—

"I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall blossom as the lily . . . his branches shall spread: his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon" (Hos. 14:5-6).

It is the life-giving dew from God that brings forth the fruition of all His Creation, to *His* glory:

"For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13).

The aromatic garments of the Bride are her "adorning for her husband": righteousness, holiness, kindness, gentleness: worship and obedience and loving service—

> *"The King's Daughter is all-glorious WITHIN. Her clothing is of wrought gold. She shalt be brought unto the King in raiment of needlework"* (Psa. 45:13-14).
>
> *"A garden enclosed is my Sister-Bride, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed"* (v. 12).

A garden is the epitome of organized beauty and productiveness and fruitfulness and new life, and is a perfect type of the glorified Bride. An area is carefully selected for site and favorable conditions, separated, marked off and protected with a wall or fence, cleared, leveled, the soil tested, enriched, broken up, worked over, sown, watered, weeded, tended, sprayed, pruned—to bring forth at last to the patient gardener an abundance of beauty of sight and smell and sound (for living creatures are part of a garden), and bountiful provision of food and healing medicines.

The Bride is enclosed, shut up, sealed: not selfishly, but for integrity, and purity, and eventual universal blessing. Safe, guarded, separated, made secure, sealed, and identified as belonging to Christ, and Christ alone.

> *"Thy plants—SHOOTS, OFFSPRING—are an orchard of pomegranates"* (v. 13).

The original for "orchard" is *pardais*: a "paradise of pomegranates." Constant emphasis is on fruitfulness, productiveness, bringing forth bountifully for the sustenance and benefit of others: healing, sustaining, giving nourishment and joy. This is the essence of the Truth, and of those who are truly in it. *Are we of the Bride?*

> *"With pleasant fruits, camphire, spikenard, saffron, calamus, cinnamon, frankincense, myrrh and aloes, with all chief spices."*

These all have their memory-stirring connotations in Scripture, and bring many things to mind. Camphire is *kopher*, the same word that is translated "atonement"—actually meaning "cover" or "cleanse": the golden Ark-cover or Mercy-seat. It is apparently so named because from it was extracted a beautiful golden dye or "covering."

Spikenard takes us to quiet Mary's loving ministration, when the odor filled the house (Jn. 12:3); she alone of all that company seeming to realize the significance and solemnity of the occasion.

Calamus and cinnamon were ingredients of the holy anointing oil, by which kings, priests, and prophets were consecrated to the service of God: consecration and service: divinely-bestowed authority and dignity.

Myrrh and aloes were the needed, loving contribution of the once-fearful but suddenly bold Nicodemus, in an hour of darkness and sorrow.

> *"Awake, O north wind; come, thou south wind: blow upon my garden that the spices may flow out"* (v. 16).

The north wind may be pleasantly cooling, or it may be bitterly cold. The south wind may be comforting and warming, or it may be burning and scorching. Cold and heat, affliction and comfort, smiting judgment and loving care, all have their place. Plants need the strengthening and variety of extremes of weather—up to a point: to stir up, to activate, to bring to life and fruition. God giveth the increase.

> *"Let my Beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruit."*

So ends the chapter, and so similarly ends the whole Song—

> *"Make haste, my Beloved!"* (8:14) . . .
>
> *"Even so come, Lord Jesus!"* (Rev. 22:14)

"Let him eat his pleasant fruit." Will he find fruit? We know he will: but shall *we* have participated in providing for his joy the "pleasant fruits" described in this chapter? Can we join in this appeal?

Verse 1 of chapter 5 actually belongs at the end of this chapter—

> *"I am come into my garden, my Sister-Bride. I have gathered my spice. I have eaten my honey. I have drunk my wine. Eat, O friends! Drink abundantly, O Beloved!"*

Here is the climax: the consummation: the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. May we all have the wisdom to choose the narrow, lonely, but glorious path that will safely lead us there!

This Is the Whole Man

"There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labor" (Ecc. 2:24).

The book of Ecclesiastes is a book for deep study and meditation. It is concerned with the age-old search for happiness and satisfaction. What is good? What is real? What is worthwhile? What is the great purpose and meaning of life?

Its theme is summed up in its opening and closing verses. It begins (1:2)—

"Vanity of vanity, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities, all is vanity."

And it ends (12:13)—

"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: "Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man."

We note from the italics that the word "duty" is not in the original. The thought is really broader and deeper. Literally it says—

"This is the whole man."

—that is, this is everything for man—all his meaning and purpose—all his life and happiness.

* * *

The Hebrew title is *Koheleth.* The Septuagint Greek version translated this, "Ecclesiastes," which means the same.

Have we ever wondered what connection of meaning there is between "Ecclesia" and "Ecclesiastes"?

The basic meaning all through is the same: *Koheleth*—Ecclesiastes—Ecclesia: "a calling out, an assembly of called-out ones."

This word also has a political aspect—it means an assembly of *citizens.* Throughout the Scriptures it is used to designate the assembly of the citizens of the Holy City—called-out to be such, from the generality of the world.

Specifically, *Koheleth* or Ecclesiastes appears to designate a member of this assembly—particularly the Chief Member—its Head, or Teacher, or Leader.

So in Ecclesiastes we clearly see a very outstanding example of what Peter terms the "Spirit of Christ in the Prophets" (1 Pet. 1:11). This gives much more meaning to the teaching of this book.

"Vanity of vanity, saith the Koheleth; vanity of vanities, all is vanity."

"What profit hath a man of all his labor which he taketh under the sun?" (vs. 2-3)

Where does it all lead to? What does it accomplish? What is the basic purpose of life? We are reminded of Jesus' words—

"What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own life?"

Verses 4-11: The Sun, the wind, the rivers,—an endless cycle, over and over, generations come and go, and are forgotten—millions upon millions—there is nothing new. In our brief hour of existence, we are but a tiny speck in the endless, apparently meaningless stream.

Verses 12-18: He considers knowledge and wisdom, the study of all things that exist, the endless marvels and beauties of creation. Is *that* the answer?—the purpose of our life? No, *not of itself.* Fascinating as such study is—still *of itself* it has no purpose or final satisfaction.

This is a very important point—that we do not get sidetracked into the mere pursuit and esteeming of knowledge for its own sake—

"Knowledge puffeth up, but love edifieth" (1 Cor. 8:1).

Knowledge of itself and for itself is sterile, and caters only to pride.

Truly creation is marvelous, and natural curiosity is continually delighted with its infinite variety, but such knowledge of itself—though fascinating—is lifeless and vain.

Even the knowledge of the Scriptures—though this is the only important knowledge—pursued simply as knowledge, is empty and dead if it does not transform the character and purify the heart.

"For in much wisdom is much grief, and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow" (v. 18).

Knowledge and wisdom of themselves just open up the heart to a greater experience and discernment of grief and sorrow and the utter vanity of all earthly things.

Chapter 2:1-3: Is *pleasure* the answer? He said: "I will try everything—every excess of sensation, indulgence, and excitement."

What did he find? It was madness and folly. It mocked him with empty disillusionment. There was no real happiness, no satisfaction.

Verses 4-11: I will try great accomplishments—great buildings, great enterprises, great public works, monumental labors, vast possessions, honors, power, and riches.

But (v. 11)—

"Then I looked on it all, and behold all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun."

He says that all through this—

"My wisdom remained with me."

All was done in a purposeful, calculated effort to find the true meaning and value of life. But all was vanity. So (v. 12)—

"Then I turned myself to behold wisdom, and madness, and folly" (v. 12).

If wisdom is sorrow, is it better to be just stupid and contented like the cattle of the field, without the capacity to wonder about life's meaning?

No. That, too, is not the answer. He could clearly see, throughout it all (v. 13), that—

"Wisdom excelleth folly as far as light excelleth darkness."

But still (vs. 14-16), all end up the same, the wise and the fool both come to the same final end in the grave.

"And I said in my heart: This also is vanity . . . Therefore I hated life" (vs. 15-17).

—What good is there in anything?

Verses 17-23 are the expression of a complete revulsion against life itself. Nothing is worthwhile at all. It is better never to have been born.

Every aspect of natural human life from the highest and most noble and most worthy right down to the lowest and most abused is alike vanity and mockery when analyzed through to its final end.

Have we not seen how the highest accomplishments and labor of one generation are abused and abased by the next?

Think of the wonderful inventions of the past one hundred years. Have they made man better? Is he using them for worldwide good, or for evil, selfish ends?

Every development of the past one hundred years—which could have made the whole earth a practical paradise—is rather being prostituted to the superhuman effort to build up colossal means of domination and mass destruction. There is more fear and misery and oppression in the earth than ever before in all history.

How much more true and forceful are the Preacher's words in the present generation than they have ever been before!

He has reached the climax of his analysis of all that is human and natural.

* * *

Verse 24 (of ch. 2), starts a new theme. He brings *God* into the picture, and from here on we start to see *meaning* in the picture. We stand farther back for a broader view, and what has seemed to be but an endless, hopeless, meaningless repetition of futility, begins to manifest form, and order, and purpose, and development.

> *"There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labor.*
>
> *"This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God."*

We must try to get the basic meaning of this, for he repeats this theme many times throughout the book. It is the underlying message—*to rejoice in what God has provided, and to rejoice in one's labor for God.*

Paul, from his dark prison cell, emphasizes this deep, basic theme of godly living throughout his message of comfort to the brethren at Philippi (4:4)—

> *"Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice!"*

The expression "to eat and drink" is sometimes used of thoughtless indulgence in the present, as—

> *"Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die."*

But it has a better and deeper meaning, which we believe is the meaning here. That meaning is a *contentment and rejoicing in God for the basic simplicities of life, contrasted to pride and seeking great things.*

This is illustrated very clearly in God's words through Jeremiah to Jehoiakim, the wicked son of the good king Josiah (22:15)—

> *"Shalt thou reign, because thou closest thyself in cedar? Did not thy father EAT AND DRINK, and do judgment and justice, and then it was well with him . . . but THINE eyes and thine heart are not but for thy covetousness."*

The words of Nehemiah, too, help us to perceive the meaning of "eating and drinking" as related to contentment and rejoicing in God's goodness. He says (Neh. 8:9-10)—

"Mourn not, nor weep . . . eat the fat, and drink the sweet . . . for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry, for the JOY OF THE LORD is your strength."

This is the meaning of the first half of Ecclesiastes' simple, two-fold creed of life—contentment and rejoicing in God, because rejoicing is a mighty power for good—a mighty power for the purifying and softening and sweetening of the character. As soon as we allow the pressures and problems of the present to dislodge us from this haven of strength, we begin to flounder and sink.

"THE JOY OF THE LORD IS YOUR STRENGTH."

An essential part of this same picture, and built upon this literal aspect of rejoicing in the basic provisions of God's goodness, is the figure of the eating and drinking of the marvelous feast of God's revealed Word and thus growing in spiritual grace and knowledge, which Job says he considered more important than his necessary food.

The second half of this creed of life is equally important—

"That he should make his soul enjoy good in his labor."

Labor is not in itself the curse. The curse was the sorrow and hardship and handicap under which man was condemned to labor because of sin. Labor itself is good. Labor is the purpose of life. Jesus said—

"My Father worketh hitherto, and I work" (Jn. 5:17).

Paul exhorted the brethren to (Phil. 2:12)—

"Work out your salvation."

To be—

"Always abounding in the work of the Lord."
"Workmen that need not to be ashamed."
"Workers together with God."

But the Preacher's principal point is *rejoicing* in labor, *enjoying* it, *thankful* of the opportunity and ability of doing it.

It is only the *cheerful* giver that God loves (2 Cor. 9:7). Anything done or given grudgingly or self-pityingly lacks the pure oil of rejoicing that was required to make a sacrifice acceptable to God.

The manna in the wilderness—the spiritual food—had the taste of *fresh* oil (Num. 11:8), because God's mercies are "new every morning" (Lam. 3:23). A joyful recognition of God's goodness must be the spirit with which we greet each new day.

The Preacher does not define the labor, because he is just giving the general principle here, but it includes every activity

of the well-ordered life, for everything that is done should be done with rejoicing as unto the Lord (Eph. 6:5-8; Col. 3:23).

"For God giveth to a man that is good in His sight wisdom and knowledge and joy" (v. 26).

All good is of God. The introduction of God changes the picture from futility to rejoicing. Man can accumulate wisdom and knowledge in the natural sense of which the Preacher has spoken earlier, but only God can give it life and meaning with the great gift of *joy.*

* * *

Thus he concludes chapter 2. Chapter 3 begins the great lessons of God's goodness.

"To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven" (v. 1).

What a wholesome, orderly contrast to the former gloomy picture he has given us!

Here is the first great lesson for man to learn—that all God's work has wisdom, and purpose, and order, and arrangement which our puny, little finite minds cannot hope to fully comprehend, but which we must accept in faith and joy.

Verses 1-8: There is a time for everything. Life is *not* just an endless, meaningless cycle, but an orderly, purposeful arrangement. All things we see and experience—birth, death, killing, healing, weeping, laughing, loving, hating—all have their place in the purpose of Providence.

Each contributes in its own mysterious way to the accomplishment of that glorious divine assurance to God's children—

"All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose."

* * *

"Whatsoever God doeth, it shall be forever. Nothing can be put to it, nor anything taken from it" (v. 14).

Here is a contrast between natural man's endless, ever-changing cycle of futile, perishing efforts, and the eternal, purposeful, unchanging work of God. God's plans will stand forever, and man—to be happy—*must* adjust himself to them.

"God shall judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for every purpose, and for every work" (v. 17).

This is the first mention of judgment in the book, and it adds more significance to the first part of the chapter about a time for everything. The whole book ends on the thought of judgment.

Man is seen to have a responsibility for his actions. The book is about the human search for happiness and good, and the eternal facts of responsibility and judgment have a major bearing on this search.

The preacher goes further than saying a man must adjust himself to the *fact* of an all-powerful and unalterable God, if he would seek happiness.

He must also adjust his life to the equally real fact of *a God who calls to account* and metes out reward or punishment according to a man's actions.

Verse 18 to the end of chapter 3 emphasize another basic lesson a man must master if he is to adjust himself to reality and learn the way of life—man's oneness with the beasts in physical constitution and nature—

> *"As one dieth, so dieth the other. Yea, they have all one breath* (*ruach:* spirit)."
>
> *"All go to one place. All are of the dust, and ALL TURN TO DUST AGAIN"* (vs. 19-20).

* * *

Chapter 4 treats of instances of the vanity of this present life.

Verses 1-3: Wrongs, injustice, and oppression. These are basic characteristics of the way of man. There is no worthwhile happiness or satisfaction to be wrought within the limits of this framework.

All natural human activities not related to the divine purpose are futile and vain, like sand castles on the seashore, for the great tide of oppression and injustice and wickedness in power keeps flowing over them and sweeping them away.

* * *

Chapter 5 contains further observations on the vanity of natural life, and the course of true wisdom.

Verses 1-3: The folly of much talking. A wise man will talk little and weigh all his words well, always aware of his own limitations, and God's infinite wisdom and greatness. The fool is known by his thoughtless, foolish, trivial chattering.

Verses 4-7: The folly of rash vows—thoughtless promises—ill considered statements. In our present dispensation the command is carried further and all vows are forbidden, but the basic principle is the same—care and thoughtfulness and restraint, instead of impetuousness and rashness—in what we say we will do.

How often we speak thoughtlessly and hastily and do not carry out what we say, in dealing with children especially. This

is fatal for any discipline or respect. Far better to say nothing at all, than to keep making hasty decisions, thoughtless commands, and impetuous warnings that are never carried through. All this is childish, immature, undisciplined folly in God's sight and will be called to account. "God hath no pleasure in fools"—and all natural reactions and spur-of-the-moment decisions are foolishness before God.

Verses 9-17: The folly of seeking pleasure and security and satisfaction in this world's goods.

Verse 18: The refrain is repeated again—*Eat and drink in thankfulness, and rejoice in godly labor.*

* * *

Chapter 6 is a continuation of the theme of the vanity of the present. Great possessions, a multitudinous family, mean nothing of themselves. These are not the basic realities of life, and true success and accomplishment cannot be measured by them. For with all these things, what is the end result but death?

And even while life lasts, these things give no assurance of happiness or peace. We must go much deeper for the answer to life's great purpose.

> *"Better is the sight of the eye than the wandering of the desire"* (v. 9).

Happiness lies in the appreciation and quiet enjoyment of what we have—not in the restless yearning for what we have not—in casting out *desire,* and replacing it with *rejoicing.*

How hard this lesson is to learn, and yet how simple it really is! Desire has *never* brought happiness, but only unhappiness. But contentment—an inner state of the mind beyond the control of any outside influence—is an *immediate* guarantee of happiness and peace.

What we have—or *can* have freely—life itself, the assurance of immortal joy if we walk worthy, the understanding of the Scriptures, the revelation of the beauty and goodness of God, the gracious invitation to companionship and comfort and joy in Him—all this is so infinitely more valuable than anything in the world that we could desire, that if we cannot be content and happy and abundantly satisfied in this, we could never find happiness or satisfaction in anything. So the problem of happiness is entirely within ourselves—not in anything outside of us that we think we desire.

These are deep and basic facts. Ecclesiastes presents the Gospel in a different way. It shows that the way of the Truth is

not only a command, an obligation, a responsibility, but that it is the only *sensible* way—the only way to find what all mankind is seeking—happiness, contentment, satisfaction, the greatest good, the most lasting joy and pleasure.

Ecclesiastes examines all the things men strive for—all the things they attach value to—all the things they *think* will bring them satisfaction—and logically traces them all through to the same final conclusion—vanity.

So the Preacher concludes chapter 6 (vs. 10-12)—and the Revised Version is a little clearer here—

"Whatsoever hath been, the name thereof was given long ago . . ."

(There is nothing new, nothing that has not been tried as a way of happiness and satisfaction, and all has been shown to bear the name "vanity") . . .

"And it is known what man is."

The word here used for "man" is "Adam," which speaks of his frailty, his dust constitution, his end in the grave—

"Seeing there are many things that increase vanity, what is man the better? . . ."

"For who knoweth what is good for man in his life, all the days of his vain life, which he spendeth as a shadow?"

Who among man knows what is best? Where shall he look, for all human activity is so futile when measured in the scales of eternity?

* * *

Chapter 7 is different in tone. It gently tells some of the things that are better. It lays down wholesome principles that point the way to the light.

"A good name is better than precious ointment" (v. 1).

Precious ointment was very pleasing and refreshing. It stands for all that is pleasant and enjoyable and luxurious. It speaks of comfort and honor and wealth.

But a good name—a good character—is much better. A good character, purified through trial and patience, is the sweet-smelling savor of a costly sacrifice unto God.

The Good Name—the Name above every Name is Yahweh Elohim—The Memorial Name—the eternal purpose—God manifested in a host of mighty ones—all joyful and all glorious!

The *Koheleth* continues (v. 1)—

"The day of death is better than the day of birth."

What a reversal of the world's views! But how irresistibly true when viewed in the light of the Scriptures! One is the beginning of trouble, trial, struggle, effort, warfare—the other is the end of all these, the accomplishment, the deliverance, the victory.

"It is better to go into the house of mourning than the house of feasting" (v. 2).

Here again, how contrary to all our natural inclinations, but how clearly true when we have the wisdom and courage to face the real facts.

"Sorrow is better than laughter" (v. 3).

How could *anyone say that?—*

"Sorrow is better than *laughter"*! Are we not constantly exhorted to rejoice, and rejoice, and rejoice?

The strange and marvelous thing is that these two apparent opposites are both beautifully true, and it is the sorrow that engenders the rejoicing.

Paul, writing to the Romans of the wonderful workings of God's wisdom, speaks of the same deep truths, and borrows the very wording of Ecclesiastes when he says (8:20)—

"The creation was made subject to VANITY, by reason of Him Who hath subjected the same in hope."

We suffer with Christ (he says—v. 17) that—in order that—we may be also glorified together.

And he says that the suffering—the sorrow—the light affliction which is but for a moment—worketh for us an eternal weight of glory.

Paul uses the same strange and beautiful paradox to describe his own condition and course through this evil world (2 Cor. 6:10)—

"As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things."

Here is how the sorrow is related to the rejoicing. Here is why in this present dispensation of probation, sorrow is better than laughter.

It is more wholesome. It is more sound. It is more constructive—more purifying—infinitely more powerful for the development of calmness and peace and kindness and sympathy and love. So the *Koheleth* continues—

"By the sadness of the countenance, the heart is made better."

—and out of the heart are all the issues of life.

Can we not, even now, even in our own limited experience of the reality of life—can we not of ourselves perceive the deep truth of the principle that "Sorrow is better than laughter?"

Therefore, the heart of the wise chooses to dwell in the sobering influence of the house of mourning, but the heart of thoughtless fools is in the emptiness and shallowness and giddiness of the house of mirth.

"The laughter of the fool is as the crackling of thorns under a pot."

And so the *Koheleth* gives many deep words of wisdom—deep, spiritual words well worthy of all the pondering and meditation that we can give them.

Every verse is a well of knowledge—a well of living waters. As we read them let us remember that they are the words of life to the Ecclesia of God—Ecclesiastes—a message to called-out ones.

And let us remember the closing words—

"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter—"

"Fear God, and keep His commandments, for this is the whole man."

The full, complete, perfect man—the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ—the called-out, multitudinous Son of Man—the Yahweh-Elohim who shall bear God's Name and in whom He will be glorified for the eternal ages.

The Shepherd of the Sheep

"Verily, verily, I say unto to you, he that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber" (Jn. 10:1).

JOHN CHAPTER TEN

We may wonder why, in introducing such a beautiful and comforting picture, he should start out with the dark and negative aspect, but unquestionably divine wisdom has a good reason, and it is profitable for us to ponder on it.

In such a picture, we are apt to be entranced with the beauty, and forget that the goodness of God is hedged with very narrow limits and solemn warnings, and it is "severity" and not "goodness" to all who ignore those warnings.

"Some other way."

The flesh always wants to do it "some other way"—some way that pleases us. This is the whole basis and significance of the temptation of Christ: "Some other way."

There is only one way—GOD'S Way: and we have to keep relentlessly bringing ourselves back to it. "Some other way" sums up the whole lesson of the chapter—the whole story of salvation.

It is all comprised in the climactic, joyful agony of the Garden of Gethsemane—

"Not my will, but Thine, be done."
"He that loseth his life shall find it."

* * *

"A thief and a robber."

A thief is that which is devious and deceptive—anything not perfectly honest and pure and in harmony with Truth—

"Thou desireth Truth in the inward parts."

A robber is that which is violent and aggressive—anything that seeks its ends by force and pressure and self-assertion. These are the two basic ways of the flesh.

* * *

"He that entereth in by the Door is the Shepherd of the sheep."

This parable has a wide range of application. We see this by the fact that Jesus says (v. 7). *"I am the Door,"* and in verse 11, *"I am the Shepherd."*

He is both. He is also the Sheep. He is everything. This is the first great lesson: HE IS EVERYTHING.

This is the ideal and conception to which we must gradually, painfully, stumblingly, but steadily shape our lives, so that we may, more and more peacefully, and truthfully, and understandingly, say with Paul—

"To me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

Until we have reached this point, we have not found peace. We are not, in the fullest sense, in the fold and of the sheep. We have not in the fullest sense, brought ourselves into a true, intimate, and saving relationship to the Good Shepherd—

"To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

* * *

"To him the Porter openeth."

If Christ is the Door, and the Shepherd, who or what is the Porter? Is that Christ, too? Yes, in a sense it is. At least, it is the spirit of Christ—the "Spirit of Christ in the Prophets."

It is true we cannot force these types too stiffly and mechanically. We must rather by meditation gradually feel the depth and beauty and fittingness and interrelationship of the symbols—gradually absorb the spirit of the picture. To pin each aspect down mechanically and unalterably is to destroy the life and depth and movement, to make it flat and dead.

The Porter is the Guardian of the Door: the Rejector of the Unfit: the Examiner and Approver of all who enter in. Basically, it is the Spirit of God, the Word, the Truth: but it takes various forms and manifestations.

In a very large sense, Moses and his God-inspired writings constitute the Porter—the Chief Servant in the House of God, preparing for the entrance of the Son—the Schoolmaster to lead unto Christ—

"Moses wrote of me. . ."

"All things written in the Law must be fulfilled concerning me."

Moses was something very special to God. God made this clear when Aaron and Miriam questioned his position—

"My servant Moses is not so: with him will I speak mouth to mouth" (Num. 12).

". . . as a man speaketh unto his friend" (Ex. 33).

The same chapter records—

"The man Moses was very meek, above all men upon the face of the earth."

And Paul says (Heb. 11) he—

"Esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt."

His Christlike character was the secret of his special relationship to God.

The way to this special intimacy with God is open to us all. It is just a question of how much we really want it, and what we are prepared to give up to get it. It is not given lightly. There must be sacrifice. But it is given freely to those who seek it with all their heart.

In another harmonious and related sense, John the Baptist was the Porter. John—the last and greatest of the long prophetic line of which Moses was pre-eminently and outstandingly the first and the head. Of John, Jesus said—

"Among them that are born of women, there hath not risen a greater than John."

"To him the Porter openeth."

From Moses to John the faithful Porter guarded the Door. Finally the Great Shepherd came, to whom they had all given witness, and on Jordan's banks the last great Porter opened the Door of the Fold—

"Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world."

We note again the strange depths and beauty of the symbolism. Jesus is not only the Door, and the Shepherd, and the spirit of the Porter—he is also pre-eminently the Sheep—the Lamb of God—the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

* * *

"To him the Porter openeth, and the sheep hear his voice" (v. 3).

"THE SHEEP HEAR HIS VOICE." This is the second great lesson and testimony of the parable. This is the test and badge of the true sheep. So many claim to be his sheep who refuse or neglect to "hear his voice"—who ignore his testimony and instructions when they run counter to their own fleshly thoughts and desires.

But the true sheep are eager and anxious to learn and to conform to the holy spirit of his teachings. They freely recognize their helpless inability to direct their own steps unaided. Though the way he leads is narrow and hard, and many turn from it to the pleasant way of the flesh, the true sheep say with Peter—

"Where shall we go? Thou only hast the words of eternal life."

There are many, many voices calling to the sheep—pleasant, and desirable, and wonderfully appealing voices. But

there is one voice of the true Shepherd of Life, one gentle voice which says—

"Regardless of all your natural, animal feelings, THIS is the best, and highest, and most joyful way."

"And he calleth his own sheep by name" (v. 3).

He is calling US by name. It is not a formal, standard, chilling, impersonal, blanket, form-invitation, but the warm, living, personal, individual approach of intimacy and love.

He knows and addresses each one separately and affectionately, as a close and beloved friend. He knows each one of us—if we are his. He knows all our problems and hopes, our sorrows and our joys, as no human being of our acquaintance, however intimate, can possibly know them.

The personal relationship between the Shepherd and each sheep is the key to all the living power of the Gospel of Salvation. Salvation is a matter of personal communion and unity with Christ. We MUST establish that personal unity: everything depends upon it.

Christ must be real and close to us—more real and more close and more intimate than any human relationship.

We must live constantly in the atmosphere of this close companionship—always pausing to renew it as we awake each morning; always closing the day with thankful meditation on its blessings.

Under a different figure, he emphasizes this in the Parable of the Vine—

"Abide in me, and I in you. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit, for without me ye can do nothing."

"Without me ye can do nothing."

Attached directly to him, as part of him, looking constantly unto him, drawing continual strength from him—we bring forth fruit unto holiness and righteousness.

On our own, no matter how hard we try, no matter how good our intentions, we struggle vainly, and flounder, and sink.

But here the figure is the Shepherd and the Sheep.

The typical characteristics of sheep are: helplessness, defenselessness, non-resistance, submission, complete dependence on the care of the Shepherd, and the need of leadership and guidance.

These characteristics are not what the world considers desirable, but they are the characteristics of wisdom and life for man in his weak, mortal state.

Sheep seem to be the animal most closely associated with man from the beginning, both practically and symbolically—the one particularly and providentially provided to supply his needs in food and clothing, and also symbolically to fill his spiritual needs.

Although we are not specifically told at the time, from every consideration, and from the reference in Revelation to the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world," it would seem clear that it was a lamb whose skin God used to cover the nakedness of Adam and Eve, in token of the Great Sacrifice later to be made in the fulness of the times.

And the basic sacrifice of the Law—the Daily Sacrifice—was a lamb, offered each morning and each evening perpetually.

* * *

"He calleth his own sheep by name."

In modern sheep-raising, the individual aspect is lost. They are raised impersonally in the mass. This is very efficient, but mass efficiency has a way of destroying the individual life and meaning of things. All progress is not progress.

Sheep respond to the individual approach of love and care. They lose their shyness and fear and blank non-individuality. They develop personal affection and attachment. Doubtless, in the marvelous Providence of God, all living creatures are this way in some degree; certainly human beings are.

I was greatly impressed with this characteristic of sheep in Texas, and with the deep lessons in shepherdship and inter-responsibility that it teaches. I have seen sheep raised as pets who would not stay with the common flock, nor follow the common habits of sheep, but who wanted always to be with those who had raised them and shown them affection and care.

Salvation—and the proclamation of salvation—is in many ways a very personal and intimate process.

There is no such thing as an "ecclesia." It is a convenient fiction, like a "corporation," but it has no tangible reality. There are only individual brethren and sisters.

The more closely they are knit together in heart and thought and love, the more fully the ecclesial entity emerges, but we must always clearly think of the personal, individual sheep, and never blur our vision into just seeing the flock as a mass.

Truly, great and spectacular things can be done with flocks, as such. Power and wealth and influence are always built on manipulating the mass. The multitude wanted to make him a

king—and how easy it would have been! How much great and spectacular good he could have done for the masses, as their king!—

"All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me."

Did he not have a duty—a responsibility—to operate on the largest scale—to spread "good" as widely as possible, to as many as possible? It is the argument of the well-meaning of the world today. And many, too, who should know better, say we should seek Divine ends by worldly, co-operative means.

But he chose the slow, hard, unspectacular, individual way. He chose to be a simple, obscure shepherd, and to call his sheep one by one, by name.

We cannot deal with ecclesias as masses. We cannot think of them as masses. It is the modern, efficient , lifeless, natural way. We must consider the sheep individually—get to know them individually—approach them individually in love.

This is why Paul fills the salutations of his letters with so many names. He thinks of them all separately, one by one. He could not, being Paul, forbear that word of loving remembrance for each one.

"He calleth his own sheep by name."

The more individual people we know—truly know in the sense of getting heart to heart in mutual understanding and sympathy and comfort—not to criticize but to sympathize—the fuller and richer and more Christlike is our life—the closer we are to the Great Shepherd of the sheep.

The more we are self-centered in our own affairs and interests and personal welfare and enjoyment, the emptier and cheaper and more useless is our life. As we shall read together soon (Jn. 12:24-26)—

"Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone":

"But if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit—"

We must each die, to bring forth fruit. Continuing, verse 25—

"He that loveth his life shall lose it, and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve me, let him FOLLOW me."

Returning to chapter 10—

"He calleth his own sheep by name; and leadeth them out."

There is a being kept safely in the fold, and there is also—at the same time—a being led out under the care and guidance of the Shepherd.

The first "leading out" is when we are called: when the Shepherd first calls our name, calls us unto him, invites us to be part of his flock—to accept his love and care, to put our faith and dependence in him.

This is a leading from death to life, from bondage to freedom, from the loneliness and helplessness and purposelessness of a sad natural life to the joy and friendship and companionship of the glories and beauties of eternal things. He leads us out of the blind, wandering mass of shepherdless sheep, and gives our life a meaning and a purpose.

There is also a daily leading out of the fold. Each day as we arise to the day's activities, we must listen to the Shepherd's voice, and follow him. Only when we are consciously and faithfully doing this are we safe.

We are never on our own. We do not set our own course. We do not choose our own path and circumstances in this life. When we try to, we are lost, wandering, self-willed sheep.

It is a characteristic of sheep to tend to forget to listen to the shepherd, to wander thoughtlessly, and to go astray and get lost, and get into danger and harm. They must be watched over, and called, and reminded. Here the type is perfect.

In another parable the love and care and concern of the True Shepherd for the lost and wandering sheep is beautifully and comfortingly illustrated. He searches the dark mountainside till he finds it.

But the individual lesson for us is to give constant heed to the Shepherd's voice, and keep close to him. Some lost sheep are never found.

As soon as the sheep loses touch with the Shepherd, it is on the wrong path and in danger. Many things in this life can attract the attention away from the Shepherd's voice—pleasing and attractive and desirable things.

It is certain that if we always keep our personal relationship of love with Christ strong and clear and uppermost in our minds, we would never do anything to grieve him—never do anything out of harmony with his goodness and holiness.

There is no power like the power of intimate, personal affection. It is *this* we must develop toward the Shepherd by meditating on his goodness, to combat all other influences in our lives.

* * *

"And when he putteth forth the sheep, he goeth before them" (v. 4).

This is the mark of the True Shepherd, as hearing his voice is the mark of the true sheep. The True Shepherd "goes before" and leads the way. So Christ has experienced all things—been "tempted and tried in all points like his brethren."

He sets no path before them that he has not trod. The most secret and intimate of our personal struggles—he has known them, and understands.

He does not direct or instruct; he demonstrates and leads. He is the model of beauty, the pattern of holiness, the great and perfect example of the dark, glorious bittersweet Way of Sorrow, Joy, and Peace.

He gave up all things in this life that are sought after and considered desirable, and he unswervingly followed the one straight course of doing the Father's will always, and thinking only of the welfare of the sheep.

He was given a life-long course of self-denial and submission and humility to follow, even to the cruelest and most exposed and shameful of deaths, and he unhesitatingly followed that path in perfect patience and love.

It is on the basis of this life of sacrifice for us that he asks our love, and offers his love to us.

Love, to be sound and true, must be based upon a mutual recognition of spiritual excellence. It is true we must love, and manifest love toward, all mankind. It must be a basic aspect of our character to dedicate our lives to the good of all. Jesus loved the rich young ruler, even as the young man rejected him for the sake of riches.

But this is a different thing from the love spoken of when it is said of Jesus—

"Having loved his own, he loved them unto the end."

This was the deep, personal, reciprocated affection of and for the true sheep. It is said specifically of John, as distinguished from the others, that he was "the disciple that Jesus loved."

Why did he single out John for this distinction. Undoubtedly because there was in John the most to love.

Love—true spiritual love—is the joyful, enlightened, mutual attraction of spirituality—and the deeper the spirituality, the deeper the love. It is by contemplating the beauties of Christ's life and character—its infinite superiority over the common life of natural, animal man—that our love is deepened and developed. And we learn from the Song of Songs that Christ's love for those who are his is built on the same spiritual foundation.

To become a part of Christ's love, we must constantly strive to make ourselves spiritually lovable.

We must, therefore, constantly endeavour to develop beauty of character, and eliminate all fleshliness and selfishness and ugliness and roughness. This eternal principle of spiritual attraction is strikingly illustrated in verse 17—

"THEREFORE doth my Father love me: because I lay down my life for the sheep."

Not because Jesus was His Son, but because he was perfectly and lovingly obedient, even unto death. Jesus says himself of natural relationship—

"Who are my mother and my brethren?"

And Paul said (2 Cor. 5:16)—

"I would not even know Jesus Christ after the flesh."

The flesh is nothing. Only the spiritual relationship counts—only the sweet spiritual oneness of the heart and thought and character—

"Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life for the sheep."

He overcame and put to death in his nature all of the things that stand in the way of perfect love.

Love—real, true, sound, spiritual love—is not something that just happens. It is strictly a matter of cause and effect—spiritual cause and spiritual effect. God loved Jesus because he, in loving obedience, dedicated his life to goodness and unselfishness and the service of others, and therefore made himself spiritually lovable. God will love us only on the same basis: He is no respecter of persons.

True spiritual love is the result of the irresistible attraction of mutual spirituality; and it is not a small, selfish, suspicious, restrictive, possessive, exclusive thing—like natural, fleshly love. Love "believeth all things, hopeth all things, beareth all things, endureth all things."

And finally—when at last we shall see him face to face, and no longer "through a glass darkly"—UNDERSTANDETH all things.

It has nothing in common with the flesh—

"The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other."

God is Love—pure Love—because He is Spirit.

"Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life for the sheep."

"So ought we to give our lives for the brethren."

May God help us to follow this narrow way of life—to rise out of the weakness of the flesh into the joy and power of the Spirit!

The most unlovely and unlovable thing is selfishness and smallness of mind—self-centeredness—thinking of ourselves, talking of ourselves, seeking our own desires and welfare. This is the natural man: ugly and repulsive in the sight of God. This is the sad and self-destructive perversion of man's true noble place in the purpose of God. God may pity such, because of its pitiable emptiness and ugliness, but He cannot love it, or accept it to Himself, for it is ungodly and of the flesh.

Each grain of corn, says Jesus, must fall to the ground and die, before it can bring forth fruit.

It cannot stay wrapped up in its own hard shell. It must fall; it must come low; it must make contact with the ground. It must face exposure to the weather and the open sky—the raw, unsheltered realities of life.

It must soften, and open up, and give of its own inner substance to reach out roots all around it; it must reach upward, toward the Light and toward the Sun; it must by the marvelous power of that Light, long gazed upon, transform dead substances into growing, living, reproducing cells—before it can bring forth fruit, and justify its existence, and be a vital, living part of nature's glorious cycle of life and interdependence and mutual support.

Christ is the great example—in far more things, and in far more ways, than we ever dream of. He is the Way, and the only Way. The sheep *must* follow the Shepherd—closely and *all the way*—if they desire to share the life he has.

* * *

Toward the end of the chapter (v. 34), Jesus calls attention to those remarkable, almost unbelievable, words of God to His people, through the Psalmist—

"I have said, Ye are gods, and every one of you children of the Most High."

"YE ARE GODS." This is our high calling in Christ—

"As many as received him, to them gave he power to become sons of God."

"That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit."

"If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do put to death the deeds of the body, ye shall LIVE!"

"I have said: Ye are gods!"

What do these things mean to us? Are we preaching, living, manifesting just HALF a Gospel—just a dead skeleton of words?

Or does our witness to the world have the life and power of complete personal dedication? John said—

"Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God!"

"And when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."

"Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure."

How could anyone who truly HAS this glorious hope in him help but purify himself, and never rest until all the oppressing impurities of mind, body, and spirit have been put away.

The power—the driving force—is the love of the Shepherd—

"We shall be LIKE HIM, for we shall see him as he is."

It is not holiness and glory as such that we must contemplate. These alone are fearful things—infinitely, hopelessly above our mortal frailties and uncleannesses and limitations.

We are creatures of weakness and ignorance and continual, frustrating failure and disappointment—with ourselves and with our circumstances. And yet, and yet, it is such as we are that are called to holiness and purity and godliness and strength.

It would be a mockery of our weak mortality, except that the call is in the resistless power of love—

"Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on us . . ."

"I am the Good Shepherd: the Good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep . . ."

"Greater love hath no man than this: that a man lay down his life for his friends."

THIS is the power of salvation! THIS is the path to joy and hope—

"That a man lay down his life—give up everything—for his friends."

We see many letters in the newspapers from soldiers in Vietnam; letters from men who love life and do not want to die, but who—FOR AN IDEAL—have risen to the joy of laying down their lives for their friends.

These are people of the world. They do it misguidedly for a corruptible crown. They do it in darkness concerning the

glorious Gospel of Life. A contemplation of them is very humbling, very self-searching.

Man—the selfish, sinful, lustful, earthbound creature—has great God-given capacities of nobility and self-sacrifice, if he is deeply moved by an ideal—if the right chords in his heart are found and struck. The secret is finding the ideal, the motive, and the power.

What of us? How do we stand? How do WE compare—the self-professed children of God—with the nobility and selflessness and bravery and sacrifice to which men of the world sometimes rise?

"Ye are gods: and every one of you children of the Most High."

Are we LIVING as such—as something very special in the earth? Can we honestly stand forth to the world and say—

"Examine how we live; examine our love and devotion, our selflessness, our dedication to the welfare of others and of all mankind—we who claim the lofty title and position of children of God."

* * *

We have recently read together again the marvelous 119th Psalm, every word of which extols the inspiring beauty and transforming power of the Divine Word—that which alone can change us from men to gods, from impurity to purity, from death to life.

It is the greatest of all mysteries: and yet it is no mystery at all. It is simple cause and effect.

The Word will transform us: expand our minds, enlarge our hearts, purify our thoughts, banish our fears, open our understandings, and give us the power to be glorious, holy, eternal sons of God in the midst of a wicked, fleshly, sinful, perishing world—IF we will but let it in to do its work—if we will expose ourselves enough to it.

"MY sheep HEAR MY VOICE, and I know them, and they FOLLOW ME."

—they hear his voice, and they follow him.

* * *

"The Lord is my shepherd: I shall not want."

What is it that we shall not want? Is it a promise of material sufficiency? It cannot be, for many of God's most faithful children have experienced bitter lack in that direction—even to loss of life itself.

Is it spiritual sufficiency? To limit it to *any* particular need is to limit it unjustifiably.

"I shall not want" goes much deeper. It is an inner, peaceful FRAME OF MIND—a way of life, a quiet, joyful acceptance of whatever does or does not come: seeking nothing, desiring nothing, knowing God's way is best, and that all things work together for good.

"The Lord is my Shepherd."

Herein, in this assurance itself, all wants and all needs are fully and abundantly satisfied. There is nothing else to want—nothing else worth wanting. If we have God, what else can there possibly be that we lack? He knows so much better than we do what we need, and what is best for us.

IN THE FULL, THANKFUL, JOYFUL ACCEPTANCE OF THIS FACT IS PEACE, AND JOY, AND LIFE EVERLASTING.

If we have this, we are complete; we are satisfied: we are content. We have all we need, all we could ask. If anything is added, we are thankful, and we enjoy it; but we feel no urgency or especial desire. Everything else is relatively secondary and unimportant—

"Godliness with contentment is great gain."

"Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall have rest unto your souls."

"Be content with such things as ye have."

—and be thankful for God's loving hand in whatever may come—of good or ill, of gain or loss, of pleasure or pain—all is of His love and wisdom—

"The Lord is my shepherd: I shall not want."

He Must Increase: I Must Decrease

"He that hath the Bride is the Bridegroom; but the Friend of the Bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the Bridegroom's voice: this my joy, therefore is fulfilled" (Jn. 3:29).

In Luke 3, we have the ministry of John Baptist, the "voice crying in the wilderness, preparing the way of the Lord."

The story begins in chapter 1. After a silence of 400 years, God once again openly manifested Himself to His people, and the wonderful events which fill the Gospels begin.

The last previous Word of God had come through Malachi, who closed his prophecy, and the Old Testament, with the promise of the coming of Elijah to turn the nation back to God.

At the national hour of prayer, as an aged priest stood offering incense for the nation in the Temple, in the Holy Place, on the altar of prayer, before the veil—the angel Gabriel appeared. He had, 600 years before, appeared to Daniel, and he was to appear again soon after to Mary.

There could have been no more fitting place or time to indicate that all things are through the power of prayer. And his first words were—

"Fear not, thy prayer is heard" (Lk. 1:13).

The priest was Zacharias, and the message was that though his wife was barren, and they were old, they should have a son.

It was to be a child of promise, a special operation of the power of God, like Isaac, Samson, and Samuel.

And he was to be a Nazarite from birth, again like Samson and Samuel.

And he was to be filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb.

* * *

We are impressed through all the events of Luke 1 and 2—the announcements and births of John and Jesus—with the constant repetition of the theme of intense and overflowing joy in the purpose of God—both by angels and by men.

It is an aspect worthy of deep consideration. Joy is a spiritual thing, and it should be much deeper and more prevalent among us.

We do not get and keep CLOSE enough to these things. We are missing so much that we would be experiencing by a deeper and more intense application. Joy is spiritual healthi-

ness and robust well-being, and we are far too weak and sickly in this respect.

This attitude of ecstatic praise should be the rule among God's children and not the occasional and seemingly unnatural exception.

This is manifest more naturally and freely among some of the smaller, simpler sects, who are not afraid of the ridicule of the world, and it is to our reproach that it is not more natural among us.

The Psalms of David, which are the mind of Christ, portray to us the true godly attitude. Truly they are filled with the burden of the passing sorrows of the present, but also with the unrestrainable and overflowing joy of the Spirit in all God's marvelous works and wisdom.

We do not fill our minds enough with the contemplation of eternal joys but far too much with petty, passing, depressing present things.

"Thou shalt have joy and gladness" (Lk. 1:14).

"Joy and gladness" is God's will and purpose for His people. All His appointments are to this end. The closer we truly get to the way and mind of God, the greater will be our joy and gladness.

Dissatisfaction and unhappiness are elements of the flesh—inevitable accompaniments of selfishness and desire.

The deceptiveness of the flesh is nowhere more clearly manifested than in its prompting to seek and expect joy and gladness outside the way of God. This is the essence of the temptation of Christ which he, in the wisdom of the Spirit, instantly rejected.

"And many shall rejoice at his birth" (v. 14).

And we must be among them! Rejoicing MUST be the basic tone of our lives. We must continuously rejoice in these things.

Regardless of, and in spite of, present problems and disappointments, deep rejoicing will always be our principal characteristic, IF our faith is real, and if we truly believe what God has said. Any other frame of mind is a reproach against God's love and goodness. We are denying by our actions our professed faith in God's glorious assurance that (Rom. 8:28)—

> *"ALL things work together for good to them that love God."*

Paul, who said (Rom. 9:2-3)—

> *"I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart for my brethren, my kinsmen after the flesh."*

Paul also said (Phil 4:4-7)—

"Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, Rejoice!"

"And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

These statements are not contradictory, nor mutually exclusive. They are rather complementary. They make up the full pattern of godliness which Paul so well manifested.

Both are essential to true Christlikeness, but the rejoicing and the peace must be the broader and deeper and over-riding, and more inward, emotions. Until we develop this basic frame of mind in ourselves, and radiate it, we cannot do anyone any good. We drive people from the glorious Truth of God, rather than attract them to its joy and beauty and goodness.

God is good, and God is love, and good and love will finally fill the earth, and everything in its own way is leading forward to this final victory.

There are no mistakes or failures in the triumphant divine plan.

We must always keep the sorrow and the rejoicing in their respective relationships. One is small and passing; the other infinite and everlasting.

* * *

"Thou shalt be dumb, because thou believest not my words."

The dumbness of Zacharias was a blessing in the form of a punishment, and so beautifully illustrates the wisdom and goodness of God's ways.

He would not believe without a sign, so he was given a sign that rebuked his unbelief, yet at the same time strengthened his faith. It both humbled and comforted him, and also taught him wisdom.

He was a righteous man, well pleasing to God (v. 6). But at the moment of visitation—the great moment of his life—the moment for which Israel had been waiting 400 years—he was not quite ready. He was caught off guard.

And yet he was in the very act in which his mind should have been most attuned for a divine communication. He stood before the altar—before the veil—offering the incense of prayer for the whole nation.

Six months later the same Gabriel appeared with similar abruptness to a poor, obscure young girl of Israel, as she went about her own private way, but how much more maturely does

the young woman react to the sudden angelic visitation and much stranger message, than the old priest!

The lesson is to live more deeply in the world of faith, and constant consciousness of spiritual things.

* * *

"And Mary arose, and went into the hill country of Judea, into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth" (vs. 39-40).

(The term translated "cousin" in verse 36 is a term of indefinite relationship and usually translated "kinsman," as in Luke 2:44).

Upon seeing Mary, Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit to prophesy and glorify God, and Mary was likewise, and the babe John leaped in the womb for joy. This is an important aspect of the whole picture concerning John and his work—joy, and the power of the Spirit. It comes out again and again.

All was of the Spirit of God for the joy of mankind. The greatest event in human history was just beginning to unfold—spoken of by the angels as "Tidings of Great Joy"—the event for which all the ages had waited—the event around which all revolved—and all the participants are deeply moved with the joy of the Spirit.

At the birth of John, Zacharias' tongue was loosed, and he, too, was filled with the Holy Spirit and praised and glorified God. Of John, Zacharias said (v. 76)—

"Thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest, for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways."

John's mission was to arouse the nation to repentance, and to introduce the Messiah to them—

"To give knowledge of salvation unto His people by the remission of their sins" (v. 77).

From the beginning, this aspect was emphasized—that the salvation men need is from themselves—from their own natural, death-tending characteristics and desires.

* * *

"Through the tender mercy of our God, whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us" (v. 78).

"Dayspring" means arising or dawning. A new day was dawning for Israel. The Sun of Righteousness was to be manifested. This is a clear reference again to the last chapter of Malachi, the promise of the "Sun of Righteousness" to "arise with healing in his wings."

This reference to light is very frequent in relation to the coming of Christ, as in Isaiah 9:2—

"The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light; they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined."

Light from darkness was the first act of creation.

The natural state of men is darkness, and all his natural thoughts and actions are foolishness. Only spiritual thoughts and actions are light. Paul presents this vividly (2 Cor. 4:6)—

"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."

The apostle John says of the same event (Jn. 1:6-9)—

"There was a man sent from God whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light."

"He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light."

"That was the true Light which lighteth every man who cometh into the world."

It can be our privilege and joy, if we choose, to come out from walking in natural death-tending darkness, into that life-giving Light.

Just accepting the Truth is not in itself coming in the Light. We are only in the Light when we are consciously choosing to repudiate all the thoughts of the flesh and to walk according to the principles of the mind of Christ.

John said, at the beginning of his first epistle (1:5)—

"This, then, is the message which we have heard of him."

—this is the basic message, this is the key point, the heart of the matter—

"God is Light, and in Him is no darkness."

"If we say we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the Truth."

And walking in light, as John goes on to show, means walking in love toward everyone. He says (1 Jn. 2:10-11)—

"He that loveth his brother abideth in the Light."

"He that hateth his brother is in darkness."

An act that is not done in love—through enlightened godly love—is an act of darkness—an act of disfellowship from God—no matter how self-righteous it may be. Everything we do must

be tested by this test. Our "zeal for the Lord," like Jehu, is often really the flesh, when we pride ourselves it is the Spirit.

When we act, or speak, or think, in anger, or annoyance, or impatience, or selfishness, or resentment, or for any motive except kindness and love, even if it be—as we suppose—in defense of the Truth, we are in darkness, and are disfellowshipping ourselves from God Who is Light and Love and Goodness.

* * *

"The child grew, and waxed strong in spirit" (Lk. 1:80).

What does it mean, to "wax (or grow) strong in spirit?"

It means, by study, and meditation, and prayer, and practice, to be strong in spirituality and control of the flesh—to be strong in the mind of the Spirit.

We cannot actually weaken the flesh, but we can continually strengthen and build up the Spirit. This is the whole purpose of our lives, and every moment not consciously engaged in this is wasted. Every time we subdue and control the natural thoughts and reactions of the flesh, we strengthen the Spirit—we "wax stronger in Spirit."

This was how John spent thirty years of preparation in the desert for his so brief, but so important, ministry—

"The child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the desert until the day of his showing unto Israel."

Thirty years' lonely preparation in seclusion—then a brief ministry of a year or so—then imprisonment and death at the whim of a wicked woman. This was the life story of him of whom Christ said there had never been a greater born of woman.

Luke 3 records that John began his ministry in the 15th year of Tiberius Caesar, and mentions various local rulers of the time. As close as can be determined, this appears to have been 26 AD.

All was under Rome, but there were different degrees of semi-independence and local control. Pilate was the Roman representative, directly controlling Judea and Samaria. His period of office was AD 26 to 36, so we know all the events in John's and Christ's ministries are within that period.

"Herod, tetrarch of Galilee" is the Herod all through the ministries of John and Jesus—the one who killed John and mocked Christ in conjunction with Pilate.

"Tetrarch" literally means "ruler of a fourth part," but it was used generally of a ruler of any portion of a country.

Iturea and Trachonitis, where Philip ruled, was the area northeast of Galilee. Abilene was still farther to the north.

* * *

"Annas and Caiaphas being the High Priests" (v. 2).

Actually there would by the Law be only one High Priest. Annas had been High Priest but had been removed by the Romans who used the office as a political one.

The official High Priest at this time was Caiaphas, Annas' son-in-law, but Annas still controlled the office. At his trial, Jesus was taken before Annas first, then before Caiaphas. Both were evil men.

* * *

"The Word of God came unto John in the wilderness" (v. 2).

There was a direct moment of divine call to go forth on the mission from which he had so long been in preparation. His message was—

"Repent ye, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand."

"Repent" in Scripture means "to turn, to change, to *think and act differently.*" It was a call to turn from fleshly things to spiritual things, from earthly things to heavenly things—to prepare for the heavenly Kingdom.

It was not understood by the people. They flocked to him; they considered him a great prophet. There was a national flurry of excitement and show of repentance but it was passing and short-lived. Jesus sums it up later when speaking to the people of John (Jn. 5:35)—

"Ye were willing FOR A SEASON to rejoice in his light."

Shallow, superficial, imperfect conversion—partial dedication—half-way faith—worldly godliness—is the greatest enemy of salvation.

Mark says, "All men"—that is, the generality of the common people, not the rulers—

"All men counted John that he was a prophet" (Mk. 11:32)

Truly he stirred the nation. He was a "burning and a shining light." But there was no permanent national effect, for the depth of the teaching, and its *vital bearing on all daily activities of life*—which is the only true religion—was never comprehended. This is so often sadly the case in the Brotherhood today.

It was the same nation that within three years rejected the Messiah whom John proclaimed, and clamored for his death.

John's ministry filled a very important and necessary part of the plan of God. The time had come for the Law of Moses to end. Jesus said (Lk. 16:16)—

"The Law and the prophets were until John."

Jesus began a new dispensation, in which the Law of Moses could not fit. The Law had served its interim purpose—

"Till the Seed should come to whom the (Abrahamic) *promise was made"* (Gal. 3:19).

Clearly a connecting link was necessary as a foundation for Christ's work—a divinely-appointed transition from the Old to the New.

John was that vital link. He was of the priesthood and rooted in the Law. He was universally recognized by all the nation as a true, divinely-sent prophet.

And when he had become fully established and accepted, he introduced Christ to them as the long-promised Messiah—

"The Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world" (Jn. 1:29).

And then John gradually faded from the picture—

"He must increase, but I must decrease" (Jn. 3:30)

When we think of John, we cannot but think, too, of his noble namesake in the Old Testament, who in some ways filled the same relation to David as John did to Jesus—

"He must increase, but I must decrease."

"He that hath the Bride is the Bridegroom, but the friend of the Bridegroom, who standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the Bridegroom's voice."

"This my joy therefore is fulfilled."

In the strange beauty of the symbol, the friend of the Bridegroom, who stepped aside for him, is also part of the Bride, so his loss was eventually his gain. So with John; so with Jonathan.

* * *

"And he came to all the country about Jordan" (Lk. 3:3).

—that is, to the plain of Jordan, just north of the Dead Sea, near Jericho.

"The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness: Prepare ye the way of Yahweh. Make straight in the desert a highway for our God" (v. 4).

Of John, when his course was run, Jesus said (Matt. 17:12):

"Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed."

"Likewise shall also the Son of Man suffer of them."

And of the fickleness of the nation Jesus speaks in the parable of the children in the marketplace (Lk. 7:33)—

"John came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and ye say, He hath a devil."

"The Son of man is coming eating and drinking, and ye say, Behold, a glutton and a winebibber!"

* * *

"Then said John to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him":

"O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

"Bring forth, therefore, fruits worthy of repentance.

"Every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire."

Gabriel had said to Zacharias (1:17) that John should—

"Make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

It was not that shallow, wavering multitude with whom his real work lay. Nor can his success be measured by its rootless natural results. He was a part of the great, unfailing purpose of "preparing a people for God."

John proclaimed no new doctrine. It was not his mission to proclaim a new doctrine. For he was sent to turn the hearts of the children to the fathers—back to the faith of the faithful fathers of the nation.

John's great message—and it was not new, but it was very necessary to be reemphasized—was that preparation for God's Kingdom required personal transformation and purification; and visible, tangible fruits of character and conduct—

"BRING FORTH FRUITS . . . Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire."

* * *

"And they asked him: What shall we do then?" (v. 10)

—what is the fruit required?

His answer must have been a great surprise. They were doubtless prepared, in their shallow enthusiasm, to do something spectacular, like Naaman—something spectacular and self-satisfying, but that would not interfere inconveniently with their normal way of life.

His answer is so simple, and yet so searching. His answer comprehends all the essence of the Old, for both Christ and Paul say all the Mosaic Law is comprehended in one word, and John's answer is the simple, practical application of that one word.

And it comprehends, too, all the essence of the New. It is the one basic principle the Old and New have in common—

"Thou shalt love thy neighbor AS THYSELF"

—thou shalt think, and act, and live your lives, in terms of general *universal* welfare, and not selfish, exclusive, *personal* welfare.

It is expressed in many and varied ways in Scripture and illustrated by many and varied examples, but it is never more simply and effectively put than it was by John to the enquiring multitude.

He puts an attractive theoretical principle in the form of an awkward and embarrassing practical challenge to sincerity—

"He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none: and he that hath meat, let him do likewise" (Lk. 3:11).

Food and raiment—all the necessities of life. And we are commanded NOT to go beyond the necessities (1 Tm. 6:8)—

"Having food and raiment, BE THEREWITH CONTENT"

—stop there, and turn the balance of your efforts and attention to eternal, worthwhile labors: lay up treasure in heaven where it is safe and lasting.

How many of us have more than two coats?—and yet there are still so many who have none. We can find them very easily if we really want to take the trouble to care.

Is this perhaps being a little too literal?—a little too searchingly and uncomfortably literal?

It is for each one to say what these things mean to him; for each one to work out between himself and God. But we can be assured that John was not expressing mere idle words, and that the way to the Kingdom he heralded lies only along the rarely trodden path that he points out so clearly.

Christ is the great example, and Paul a worthy illustration of following that example—

"Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ"

"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus."

"Look not every man on his own things" (Phil. 2:4)

"Love seeketh not her own."

"Though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor."

In the providence of God, John sufficiently—even though but shallowly and temporarily—cleansed and aroused and purified the nation, that God could manifest Himself through

Christ among them and make a deep impression on many individual hearts that John had stirred to hope and expectation.

We are aware of the difficulty that even the sincere ones experienced in trying to fit Christ as he *was* into their conception of what the Messiah *should be*—

> *"We have heard out of the Law that Christ abideth forever: and how sayest thou that the Son of man must be lifted up?"* (Jn. 12:34).

And when Jesus was asked—

> *"Why say the scribes that Elias must first come?"*

He answered (Matt. 17:12)—

> *"Elias is come already, and they knew him not.*
>
> *"Then the disciples understood that he spoke of John the Baptist."*

Elijah truly comes at the end, before the great day of Christ's manifestation to Israel, but there had to be an Elijah for the first coming, for the first coming was a real and true offering to the Jews of the Messiah and the kingdom.

God knew that Israel would reject Christ, and that this would not be the day of his glory to which the coming of the literal Elijah was related. It was so foreseen and foretold, and in the wisdom of God the working out of the plan of redemption depended on Christ's rejection.

But, still in the offering of Jesus to them, the promise of the forerunner must be fulfilled, to carry out God's part and to remove any justification of their rejection—

> *"This* (John) *is Elias, IF YE WILL RECEIVE IT"* (Matt. 11:14).

If they had accepted Christ, John would have been the complete fulfilment of the Elijah prophecy, but God knew it was not to be.

* * *

John was sent to prepare the nation—to raise the national expectancy—to focus attention on the manifestation of Christ.

This was the principal purpose of his baptism. It was a transitional, introductory appointment, to lead to Christ, to prepare for Christ, and to provide the avenue by which Christ should be manifested.

It was a typical, national purification, because for three years God was going to manifest Himself intimately among them in His only begotten Son. John said, of the purpose of his baptism—

"That he should be made manifest to Israel, THEREFORE am I come baptizing with water" (Jn. 1:31).

Baptism is a recognition of uncleanness and a seeking for cleanness. John's baptism was another link between the Old and the New.

The Law had its washings and purifications. The principle of symbolic cleansing by water was already established. The wisdom of God carried it a step further in John' ministry, and made it a public act and testimony of repentance from sin, and allegiance to righteousness.

The way was thus gradually prepared for the full significance of baptism as a death to the Old and a resurrection to the New—an entering into, and becoming part of, Christ and his sacrificial death and life bringing resurrection.

To further establish the smooth continuity, Jesus—as he began his ministry—associated disciples with himself by baptism, and gradually came to baptize more disciples than John (Jn. 4:1). Thus was the transition gently made—

"He must increase, but I must decrease" (Jn. 3:30)

But baptism had still not yet been revealed in its full significance as related to Christ's great sacrifice for sin.

* * *

John proclaimed a principle that the Jews were now going to have to see clearly—a principle illustrated and established in their own history, but which the nation had never understood.

It is a principle later greatly emphasized by Christ and Paul, and shown by them to go right back to the beginning in the selection of Isaac and rejection of Ishmael; the selection of Jacob and rejection of Esau—

"They are not all Israel who are of Israel, but the children of the promise are counted for the seed" (Rom. 9:6-8).

John said to them (Lk. 3:8)—

"Begin not to say within yourselves: We have Abraham to our father."

This was the national delusion, and it can be equally deluding today. Christ's brethren are not such simply because they belong to an ecclesia or a fellowship.

Membership of itself is no guarantee. It is essential, truly, and part of the required obedience, that we assemble with those of like Faith, and that we keep separate in fellowship from error.

But standing before God depends—not on mere membership—but on the character of our day-to-day and moment-to-moment activities and interests.

We are "in Christ" ONLY if the everyday course of all our thoughts and acts are in Christ.

The principle John emphasized is still vital: It is not ritual and relationship but righteousness and reality that constitute sonship to God.

We are in fellowship with the Father only when we are thoughtfully and consciously walking in the Spirit-Light.

* * *

John was utterly single-minded and intense in his unsparing denunciation of wickedness, regardless of what was involved.

Because of his testimony against Herod's wickedness, Herod shut up John in prison, at the instigation of Herodias, his wife.

While in prison, John sent to Jesus, saying (Matt. 11:3)—

"Art thou he that should come or look we for another?"

This question by John presents somewhat of a puzzle. We must try not to read too much into it, nor too little. It was recorded for our comfort and admonition, and we must seek its lessons.

It is a great and helpful revelation of his inner feelings. It cannot be that John actually doubted that Jesus was the Messiah. This, he himself, on the direct evidence and testimony of God, had established. But he was perplexed. He sought assurance and reaffirmation.

It was a supreme test and trial for John to be confined to a dungeon while Jesus, whom he had announced as the Son of God and the long-promised Messiah, went about the country teaching, with no message for John, no hint of recognition of his plight, no explanation, no indication of what John could expect.

We are so strikingly reminded of Elijah himself when, after his so courageous stand on Mount Carmel, he fled in disappointment and despair before Jezebel.

John did not lose faith, but he seemed to lose heart and hope. The weak human flesh was spiritually exhausted by the long intensity of the struggle. John was mortal. He needed to be strengthened and comforted, and reminded of the glorious and unchanging realities.

In this perplexed appeal of John from the dark dungeon to the one whom he had joyfully and courageously hailed as the

long-awaited Messiah, we feel a closer fellow-feeling with John than in any other part of his life. He was truly one of us, though he looms so great in the purpose. He struggled against the same mortal frailty, and out of weakness was made strong. Like Job, he could not understand and he agonized for an explanation of a seeming contradiction.

Jesus did not give him any explanation. He did not even answer his question. John must, like Job, endure his unexplained testing in faith unto the end.

But Jesus did give him this—fresh, powerful, conclusive evidence to strengthen his faith and encourage his patience, and he reminded him there were great blessings for those who held fast to assured realities in spite of passing appearances, and who did not weary or stumble at unexplained problems that lay behind the veil of God's wisdom.

We can not really say Jesus was rebuking John for being offended or stumbling. Rather it would seem he spoke to strengthen John's obvious struggle against the natural temptation of the flesh to be impatient under trial. His message was to help in the trial without hindering its purpose.

Jesus himself required and received angelic strengthening in Gethsemane. In the extremity of the trial there, he asked a question—"Can this cup pass?"—that it is not easy for us to fit into the pattern of his complete knowledge of what was before him, and his unreserved self-yielding to it.

But there is no question of his faithfulness, obedience, or sinlessness.

The record of these things is to help US to overcome—to encourage us with the example of others who have overcome. It helps us to realize that there are many things about temptation, about the flesh, about the ways of God, about others, about ourselves—that we can not understand.

It is well we DO realize the pitiful limits of our understanding in so many things.

Jesus did not send one word of direct encouragement or approbation to John by the messengers. There was just the calling attention to the miraculous, beneficial manifestation of the Spirit in works of life and healing, and a reminder of the blessedness of a patient, trusting faith unmoved by any stumblingblocks—

"Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me."

The wisdom of Christ's reply lay in the fact that John's real need was not an explanation, but the realization that true

blessedness consists in a faith that will joyfully and thankfully hold fast through anything, without explanation.

This alone is really faith at all. Jesus knew what John needed and that he would overcome, for as soon as the messengers were gone, Jesus spoke to the multitude of John's true greatness—

"Among them that are born of women, there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist."

* * *

We are told no more about John's thoughts, feelings, and sufferings. A little later on they all came to an end, at the hand of Herold's executioner.

It seems sad that a righteous man like John should be cruelly cut off by wicked hands, but in the wisdom of God he had done his work.

We *must* get GOD'S viewpoint, and we must get a true view of the purpose of this present life as simply a brief preparation for an eternal reality. It was not suitable that John should continue, once Christ had been introduced to the nation, and begun his ministry.

John's work was done.

John's whole purpose was to prepare the way for Christ. He was the last of the prophets of the old dispensation. If he had lingered on when his work was finished, it would have detracted from the power and success of that work, and hindered the transition from the Old to the New.

The sword of Herod, rather than a calamity, was a wise and merciful provision of God to clear the way for the new, and to give His beloved rest. And, as the forerunner, he must precede his Master in this also. Of John's death, Jesus said—

"They did unto him whatsoever they would":
"Even so shall the Son of Man also suffer of them."

The picture at the beginning is joy, and at the end it is sorrow, but it is not the sorrow of those who have no hope.

Rather it is through the sorrow that the promise of the joy is fulfilled, and we meet now in rejoicing to commemorate an event that at its occurrence plunged all God's people into sorrow and despair.

Looking back, now it is all past, we see the sorrow as a passing and necessary factor in the wisdom of God's love to produce the final joy. And so—in the end—all sorrow will be seen to be.

Strong Crying and Tears

"Jesus, being full of the Holy Spirit, returned from Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness" (Lk. 4:1).

Matthew adds, "to be tempted of the devil"—the *diabolos.* He was led there for this purpose by the Spirit of God. This testing and trying and proving was an essential part and step in God's purpose in and through him.

Now these things are written for our admonition. Temptation is our great problem. Paul felt this keenly—

"I find a law in my members that when I would do good, evil is present with me."

"O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom. 7:21-24).

The more we learn about temptation, the better equipped we are to combat it. In our reading today is the most important temptation that has ever occurred—the typical temptation, the typical defense, the typical victory—that of our great Forerunner and Example.

We *must* realize its *reality*—the realness of its effort, its attraction and appeal. The more we can see the basic principles and significance of this temptation, the better we shall be able to cope with all temptation.

* * *

We note from verse 2 that Jesus was tempted, or tested, not just at the end of the forty days, but throughout the forty days. We note, too, that this testing fittingly occurs at the beginning of his ministry, just after he had been announced to the nation as the Lamb of God, and had received the power of the Holy Spirit without measure. This temptation gives clear testimony and emphasis to a vital aspect of Truth—that Jesus was a real man, subject to human weakness, and not a "coequal" part of an omnipotent divinity, as the doctrine of the "Trinity" teaches.

It is the very essence of the Truth that Jesus suffered under the burden of the same defiled nature, the same law of sin in his members, the same pulling of the flesh, as his brethren. The whole meaning and value of his work and victory was his *real,* complete, perfect, continuous unfailing overcoming.

He never sinned. He never failed. Truly he was strengthened and helped for the tremendous work he had to do—the work of *completely*—perfectly—without one flaw or failure—resisting and overcoming and crushing, by the power of the Word of

God, every moment-to-moment tendency of the flesh during every moment of his responsible lifetime.

Truly he was strengthened; because what he accomplished is—as are all other things—in the ultimate, the work of God. Jesus said himself, "I of mine own self can do nothing."

* * *

Here, in this account of the temptation, are the inner workings of how he overcame. And we note that there was no prolonged or complicated argument—just the clear, simple and ideally appropriate quotation from the Word of God. *One passage of Scripture is worth more than all human writing of all ages combined.*

There is a great lesson here in dealing with temptation. The closer we can get to the *simplicity* of the Word, the closer we are to the way of Christ and the mind of the Spirit. We are clearly warned that—

> *"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?"* (Jer. 17:9)

If we give the flesh any scope to twist and argue and confuse the issue, we are lost. There is Scripture for every occasion. It is our wisdom and our life to devote ourselves intensely to seeking these and knowing them as a shield against all temptation.

"If thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread." The utter simplicity of this temptation is deceptive, for actually, the principles involved are very deep and embody *all temptation.*

John speaks of the *lust of the flesh*—the desire to enjoy things; the *lust of the eyes*—the desire to get things; the *pride of life*—the desire to get power and admiration. He says these things are all of the world and not of the Father.

We may be surprised to learn that the principle word for "lust" in the New Testament is translated "desire" when applied to the feelings of Jesus and the angels, and "concupiscence" and "covet" when used in a bad sense elsewhere. The point is, *there is no sin in desire or lust itself;* it can be good or bad. The sin is in *what* is desired and *why.*

The reason why the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life are of the world and ungodly is because they are all aspects of *selfishness*—desires to *get,* and to gratify self.

We must get at the *root* of the desire. Is it a desire to GET, or a desire to GIVE?—a desire to gratify ourselves or a desire to please God?

We must desire to give; seek opportunity to give, center all our pleasure and satisfaction in giving; be thankful of any opportunity, however small and insignificant, of giving, for—said Jesus—it is more blessed, more happy, more satisfying, more enjoyable to give than to get.

We must put aside all desire to get as evil, deceptive, self-destroying misdesire. Temptation, if traced to its roots, always works through the desire of getting something—wanting something—not being satisfied—not being willing in thankfulness to accept God's way and God's provision.

* * *

"If thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread."

This is so simple that it almost seems childish, but let us not be deceived. Here are the lessons of life. Remember the simplicity of the temptation of Adam and Eve. Like any other study, we must learn the basic facts of simple examples. All complications and secondary details must be eliminated so that the basic principles stand out.

It is put in childish form for us because we are but children, for all our assumed maturity and wisdom. Only as simple children can we find the simple, childish way of life. *Worldly wisdom and knowledge and learning and education are a tremendous—almost an insuperable—obstacle in the discernment of the narrow, simple way of life.*

* * *

We must first realize that Jesus was physically exhausted, and experiencing the continual pressure of the pangs of hunger in its extremist form. He had been forty days and nights without food—forty days and nights in a wilderness, among wild animals, sustained only by faith and prayer.

We must endeavor to fully realize the reality, the extremity, the intensity of the temptations—not just as bald and obvious invitations to disobedience, but *subtle, disguised enticements* to deviate from the narrow path of faith and obedience and seek right ends by wrong means.

Jesus was the Son of God, of quick understanding, yet these temptations were real and powerful. What then of ourselves, in our own waste, howling wilderness filled with all the pitfalls of the dark deceptiveness of the mind of the flesh? What safety or hope is there in any course short of constant prayer and study?

Hunger was a constant, gnawing pressure upon him, and he knew he had at his fingertips unlimited power to satisfy it—he possessed without measure the power that sustains the universe. Only a moment's effortless willing would have produced bread before him.

One small loaf of bread. Was he being wise or foolish, reasonable or unreasonable, to just do nothing for himself, and leave everything to God? Hadn't God given him the means of sustenance? Shouldn't he use it at least just to the extent of bare necessity—just a little plain bread? Why all this fuss, this pantomime of self-denial about such a simple little thing?

So the temptation would be presented—*"You are being stubborn, you are being foolish, you are being 'holier-than-thou' about trifles. You need the bread to do God's work. The Spirit was given for this work. If you follow this course, you'll be hurting and restricting the very work you were given the Spirit to do."*

Jesus, a mortal man, a man subject to all the natural weakness of mortal flesh, had been entrusted with the Spirit without measure. He had to be perfectly clear in his mind and in his determination as to the use of this power. Carrying the burden and responsibility of this awful power, he had to work out his salvation with fear and trembling. He had to see the picture with perfect clearness and not deviate from it to the right hand or the left.

He had to clearly discern the motions of sin and the deceptions of the *diabolos* in all their dark variety and confusion. He had to discern right down to the finest points the distinction between right and wrong—thou shalt and thou shalt not.

We are, in all this, being taught *the absolute necessity of as much knowledge and comprehension and discernment of the Word of God as we can possibly acquire* within the limits of our capacity and opportunity. Jesus, the Head, required this discernment to the utmost degree for the work he had to do.

We have just finished reading together the 119th Psalm. One hundred and seventy-six times, in one hundred and seventy-six verses we have read the same message in one hundred and seventy-six different ways—

"O how love I Thy Law!"
"Thy Law is a light to my path."
"Give me understanding, and I shall keep Thy Law."
"Teach me Thy statutes."

"Through Thy precepts I get understanding, therefore I hate every false way."

This same simple (yet profound) thought—over, and over, and over again—that our *only hope* lies in a constant seeking a FULLER UNDERSTANDING of God's Word.

The answer, too, is repeated over and over—

"It is my meditation all the day."

"Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."

This is the beautiful lust of the Spirit, that lusteth against the flesh—the righteousness of God—the good and perfect gift from above—the lust to *give*—to give *love*—to give *goodness*, to give *comfort* and *help*, to give happiness and pure divine measure.

* * *

"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God."

What bearing does this answer of Jesus have on the suggestion to make a loaf of bread to satisfy legitimate hunger? The tempter did not suggest "living by bread alone." Couldn't Jesus have found a scripture more to the point?

We know that this scripture must be the one above all others that is most truly and deeply to the point, and it is our wisdom and our life to try to find out why. What is the *background* of this scripture? On what occasion was it recorded? What does it apply to?

We find that Jesus is quoting from the words of Moses in Deuteronomy 8:2-3, and we note throughout how *perfectly* it applies to Jesus' circumstances, and the purpose of them. In fact, it helps to explain them. These two portions are providentially related as type and antitype—

"Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart."

"He humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger; that He might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live."

And verse 5—

"Thou shalt also consider in thine heart that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the Lord thy God chasteneth thee."

"He learned obedience by the things that he suffered."

Wasn't he obedient before? Did he have to *learn* obedience? He was never disobedient, but he had to learn by trial and testing and experience the full and beautiful depths of faithful, trusting obedience under tribulation and suffering.

How—in the face of this clear picture of the loving purpose and operation of God—how could Jesus presume to make bread on his own by the Spirit-power, and spoil the whole arrangement of God's operation?

This whole chapter 8 of Deuteronomy is so much to the point. See verse 18—

"Thou shalt remember the Lord thy God, for it is He that giveth thee power."

Jesus must never forget that the power he had was of direct divine gift, and for divine use only. Dare he then use it to sustain himself directly, and thus cut himself off from the sweet dependence upon God that he shared with all his brethren?

"It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful"

—and Jesus was the steward of an infinitely greater treasure than any man has ever held. How careful, then, must *we* be, as faithful stewards, to "Render to God that which is God's." And *all* is God's except for the little which—for the present—He instructs us to give to Caesar for the accomplishment of God's purpose.

Caesar's part is very specifically defined by the law of the land in which we live, and we must take care in the sight of God that we give it honestly and in full measure. Beyond that, all must go to God.

* * *

The order of the next two temptations is different in Matthew and Luke. There must be a reason. We know that God does not make mistakes. We know He does nothing without a reason, and we know that this is the Word of God.

It has been suggested that this variation of order is to indicate that there was a doubling of the temptation series, and that actually there were six—first the three recorded by Luke, then the three by Matthew. This is not unreasonable, for we know the whole forty days was a period of temptation.

And there is a certain fitness in this suggestion, for doubling is a significant aspect of important divine things, to signify

certainty and establishment. It would lay, at this vital crisis in Jesus' ministry, a broader basis to his victory, showing that he was unmoved and unshaken by repeated assault. It would introduce, too, the very fitting symbol of six.

* * *

"And the devil (the diabolos) *taking him up into an high mountain, showeth him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, and saith,"*

"All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them; for that is delivered unto me, and to whomsoever I will I give it. If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine."

The "diabolos" is sin-in-the-flesh, in all its forms and manifestations—from within, from without, personal, social, national, political.

The particular identity of the diabolos—tempter—deceiver—in Jesus' case is not revealed, as it is not in the very similar case of Job. Therefore, it is not important that we know. The value of the record for us lies in other aspects of the matter, and God leaves out the unimportant parts that our attention may not be distracted from that which is important.

Bro. Thomas and bro. Roberts were both firmly convinced that there was an external, personal tempter, whoever he may have been. We believe that the more we study the matter scripturally, the more we will be convinced that this is the soundest and safest view.

When God's purpose requires it, He can make sure that the necessary adversary is in the right place, as in the case of Adam, and Moses, and Job, and so many others.

We know Jesus had to battle and overcome the diabolos *in himself.* This was the whole essence and power and meaning of his victory. Bro. Roberts points out that the mere impulse to do something God had prohibited is not in itself transgression. But the slightest entertaining of, or giving in to, that impulse—even only in thought—*is* transgression.

And Jesus was absolutely sinless in thought, word, and deed. That basic fact we must preserve inviolate, and *no interpretation can be entertained which even hints at undermining it.*

The idea is abhorrent that Jesus would ever voluntarily entertain, or toy with, or soliloquize within himself upon a course of sin, even for a moment. To his pure mind all sin was repugnant and hateful, immediately upon recognition.

He had to examine all suggestions and desires and impulses in the light of God's Word, immediately rejecting them without thought of compromise, as soon as their unscripturalness was perceived—

"Get thee behind me Satan, for thou savorest not of the things of God, but of men."

* * *

What a jump from a loaf of bread to all the glory and authority of the kingdoms of the world! What a vast range temptation covers! The *first* was the desire of the flesh in its simplest and most harmless-seeming form. *This* is the pride of life in its fullest and highest possible attainment.

The first was plausible, but we may wonder how this offer of the kingdoms of the world could in any way be a temptation to him who knew the mind and purpose of God so well.

Let us fully realize that there is much we do not understand, much we shall never understand during this day of weakness and of *"seeing through a glass darkly."* But *this does not bar us from getting the practical guidance and instruction and comfort and warning and mental transformation that these things are designed to give us.* Even Paul said:

"Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended, but this one thing I do—I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

Let us extract the utmost value we can from the vast amount that *is* revealed, and not speculate or be troubled about what is not revealed. There is always danger and division in hazy speculation in the secondary areas, where the light shines only dimly. Let us keep our minds out in the safe bright middle of the beam.

Let us consider a few facts that will help us understand this temptation a little better—help us realize that the battle Jesus fought and the victory he won were very real indeed.

First consider some of his sayings during his ministry—

"I have a baptism to be baptised with, and how am I straightened till it be accomplished!" (Lk. 12:50)

("Straightened" here is the same word as "sick" in "sick of a fever"—Acts 28:8. It means to be pressed down, continuously distressed and afflicted). Jesus said (Matt. 26:39)—

"Father, save me from this hour" (Jn. 12:27).

"Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me."

Again we read (Jn. 11:33)—

"Jesus groaned within himself, and was troubled."

"In the days of his flesh he offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears" (Heb. 5:7).

"My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me? Why art Thou so far from helping me?"

"I am a worm, and no man, a reproach of men and despised of the people. All they that see me laugh me to scorn" (Matt. 27:46; Psa. 22:1-7).

Truly we *must* realize the greatness of the struggle. *He learned obedience by the things that he suffered.* And these forty terrible days in the wilderness stand out with his crucifixion as the beginning and ending of his sufferings for men, two great crises of struggle and affliction.

He was the second Adam, being tested to the uttermost. Once again mankind stood at the crossroads of life and death, and all their destiny was laid upon the shoulders of this one man, alone in the wilderness, famished and physically exhausted after forty days and nights of danger and privation.

The tempter suggested an *easier way* of establishing the kingdom—of beginning Christ's reign on earth. The essence of the temptation seems to be the questioning the necessity, yea, questioning the rightness and justice of the struggle and sorrow and suffering involved in *God's* appointed way. *Why* must this terrible suffering be?

Let us not forget that even three years later in Gethsemane, on the eve of his crucifixion, he pleaded—

"My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me."

These things are recorded to show us the terrible reality of the struggle and the glorious magnitude of the victory and sacrifice.

"And Jesus answered and said, Get thee behind me Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve."

* * *

"And he set him on a pinnacle of the Temple, and said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down from hence: for it is written—"

"He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee."

"It is written." Here was a new and subtle approach—"It is written." We can always find Scripture to justify anything that the flesh wants to do.

"Shall we call down fire from heaven as Elias did?" (Lk. 9:54).

"We have a law, and by our law he ought to die" (Jn. 19:7).

They quoted God's law to condemn God's Own Son.

* * *

What is the temptation in this case? Why should it be a temptation to Christ to cast himself down from a great height? We get light on this from the answer Jesus made—

"Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."

The Revised Version has "Make trial of." From the beginning, men had said in their weakness and frailty—

"Whereby shall I know this . . ."

"How can the thing be? . . ."

"I shall not believe unless . . ."

"We trusted that it should have been . . ."

"Art thou he that should come? . . ."

God is patient and gentle with weakness of faith and perception, but Jesus tells us that—

"Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."

And—

"Where much is given, much is expected."

Jesus, too, must be tested, and made strong in the testing.

* * *

"Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."

What is the lesson for us? Do we tempt God? Put Him to the test? Question anything He does? Presume to force His hand? Set conditions for Him to meet? This is a common presumption, rooted in the pride of life, as if He were our private God, bound to do our private bidding.

How common it is for men to question His ways, and set their own standards to measure Him by! Judge Him on the basis of what *they* think He should do!

"Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."

"A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh a sign, and no sign shall be given it."

The signs that God Himself has provided according to His own judgment and wisdom are all-sufficient. If they cannot stir us to obedience and zeal, nothing could.

"If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."

"Moses and the Prophets"—there is the key. All the power of salvation is there, if we will make the effort to acquire it. We cannot expect God to work a special miracle for us, and save

us from the final "casting down," if we do not lay zealous hold on the means He gives—constant study of His Word.

> *"The Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom."*

The Jews wanted something spectacular to glorify their nation, and lead them to triumph. They laid down the course that God should follow, instead of humbly seeking God's way. They wanted to put God to their test.

This casting himself down from the pinnacle of the Temple would be just the kind of thing that would have appealed to them and impressed them. Should he use some means like this of gaining notoriety and favor? It would be so easy!

The Greeks, on the other hand, wanted everything explained to *their* satisfaction, to gratify their philosophy and glorify their wisdom. They set down *their* rules for God.

> "But," says Paul, *"We preach Christ crucified in weakness, the scorn of the worldly wise, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness, but to them that are called, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."*

Christ tempted, Christ suffering, Christ mocked, and rejected, Christ crucified—the power of God, and the wisdom of God, and the love of God, and the righteousness of God, and the salvation of God!

Love Shall Wax Cold

"Because iniquity shall be multiplied, the love of the many shall wax cold" (Matt. 24:12 R.V.).

The latter days are to be days of unbelief. This is the testimony of prophecy. This is one of the great signs of the time of the end in the world *and in the brotherhood.*

For over one hundred years—just about the period since the revival of the Truth by brother Thomas—the churches of the world have been undermining the foundations of belief. The pretension of science, the speculations of evolution, the theories of the higher critics attempting to reduce the Bible to folklore, have all been directed against the authority of God and His Word.

The whole trend of current thought is to glorify man, and dim and discredit the creatorship and supremacy of God. There is an increasing worship of, and dependence upon, "science" and the human mind, which is still—at its highest and best—but the *mind of the flesh,* utterly incapable of reasoning correctly without specific divine instruction, as the Scriptures so plainly declare—

> *"The way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps"* (Jer. 10:23).
>
> *"Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise . . . that no flesh should glory in His presence."*

The danger to ourselves is that it is so easy—yea, almost inevitable—to be unconsciously influenced by the world, in relation to these things.

Modern man seems so accomplished and learned—modern inventions and discovery so marvelous. But we must keep ever before us the simple scriptural picture—

> *"It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps."*

We must distinguish between natural and spiritual things. Brilliance in one means absolutely nothing in the other. The mind of the flesh, however brilliant or well-educated, knows only the things of the flesh.

The issue is between darkness and light—let us keep this clear. The mind of the flesh at its best is but darkness—brilliantly clever darkness, but still only darkness and leading to death, *utterly incapable of reasoning about the real, spiritual facts of the universe* (1 Cor. 2:14)—

"The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

This is a pressing problem before us today. A large section of those using the name Christadelphian, who once stood on the old basis have been led down the same path that led to the apostacy in the first centuries—over emphasis and glorification of worldly wisdom and learning.

Our pioneer brethren drew a sharp line between the true wisdom of God, and the "wisdom" of the world. Many think that brother Thomas was too severe in his remarks about the world's religious and scientific leaders, but the more we see this subtle danger invading the brotherhood, the more we realize that *he spoke strongly because he clearly discerned the danger that has, in time, destroyed every past revival of truth.*

His words were strong, but he was on the safe, true side, and the more we see and hear of current trends in the brotherhood, the more we are impressed with this fact.

"The fear of the Lord"—as we have been so beautifully and impressively reminded in our readings lately—"is the *beginning* of wisdom."

Nothing short of that *is* wisdom at all. How well and conclusively this sums up the futility of all the "wisdom" and activity of natural man!

"If thou criest after knowledge and liftest up thy voice for understanding. If thou seekest for her as for hid treasures—THEN shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God."

"For the LORD giveth wisdom; out of HIS mouth cometh knowledge and understanding" (Prov. 1:3-6).

The unbelief of the world in a disguised form finds its reflection in the brotherhood. It is inevitable that this should be so. The pull of the flesh is strong, and unless the attraction of the Spirit is very powerful, brethren and sisters will naturally reflect the current views and outlook of the world. Baptism of itself is no insulation against the glitter of the world and the self-deception of the mind of the flesh. Jesus said (Matt. 24:12)—

"Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold."

The urgency of the warning is much clearer in the Revised Version:

"The love of THE many shall wax cold."

And the New Revised—

"MOST men's love will grow cold."

The literal meaning is not just an indefinite "many," as we might take from the Authorised Version, but *"the* many,"—that is, most, the majority.

"Because iniquity shall abound." Why would iniquity abounding make believers' love get less? Is it their *own* iniquity that is meant, or the prevalence of iniquity around them? Are they gradually and unconsciously tinged with the surrounding unbelief, or are they weakened and disheartened by the fewness of believers and the apparent prosperity of sin?

In considering these questions, and endeavoring to extract guidance and comfort from what is rather a sad subject, we must consider the meaning of "iniquity," and of "love."

The word here translated "iniquity" is *anomia*, which means "lawlessness." It is the word translated "without law" three times in 1st Corinthians 9-21, twice in Romans 2:12, and "lawless" in 1st Timothy 1:9.

The first epistle of John is a deep spiritual textbook on Love and Sin, the two great powers that contend for the mastery of the earth. All mankind are arrayed on one side or the other. We know that the final victory will go to Love, and to all who have faithfully arrayed themselves under its banner—

"His banner over me was Love" (S. of S. 2:4).

John says (3:4), "Sin is *anomia*—lawlessness"—this same word. Sin is everything that is natural—all this is outside the direct guidance and control of the law of God.

Lawlessness—lack of interest in God's Law—ignorance of God's Law—a deliberate ignoring of God's Law—lack of *love* for God's Law—lack of *perception* of the necessity and beauty and beneficence and blessing of God's Law.

God's Law is life and love. God's Law is the law of the Spirit of Life—the shining light leading from death to life. Sin is *lawlessness*—living according to blind selfishness and desire, like a natural, lawless, wild beast.

"The Law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul" (Psa. 19:7).

On this, the Psalmist further says (23:3)—

"He restoreth my soul: He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His Name's sake."

The Psalmist knew and rejoiced that God's Law was lovingly designed to restore the soul from the selfish ways of sadness and death, and to lead through the path of peace and righteousness to everlasting life and joy.

"Because iniquity—anomia—LAWLESSNESS—shall abound, the love to the many shall wax cold."

We are concerned particularly with the *positive* aspect of the problem of the diminishing of love because of the increase of lawlessness—how to guard against the dangers involved.

The first step is to clearly discern the difference between natural and spiritual things, and to fix our minds and allegiances on the spiritual.

What is the purpose of our life? What is our goal? The things of the Spirit are concerned with life and joy; the things of the flesh are related to sorrow and death. The things of the Spirit are the things of the Law of God; the things of the flesh are the things of natural darkness and lawlessness.

Increase of unbelief frequently, almost always, takes the form of an *assumed* increase of knowledge—a knowing better, a feeling of being cleverer than the instruction of God's Word.

There is one scriptural fact that will give us a clearer and more living picture of the issues before us. That is that, scripturally speaking, *belief is faith and faith is belief.* They are not two things, but one. There is only one word for both in the New Testament, and the different translations are just translators' whims. To believe is to have faith; to have faith is to believe, and—

"Faith is the basis of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Heb. 1:1).

Faith, or belief, as the apostle goes to great lengths to illustrate in Hebrews 11, is a vital, living force, a way of life, a power that made men stand alone in the face of the most violent enmity and persecution, and that led them onward to every form of accomplishment and heroism—

"These all died IN FAITH."

So when the Scriptures speak of belief, let us not get a cold, flat, dead, powerless, insipid picture of mere passive mental assent. It is not a saving or pleasing belief in God's sight unless it completely dominates and transforms our lives. John says, as he begins his first epistle (1:4)—

"These things write we unto you that your joy may be full."

This is the key—*"That your joy may be full."* God's great purpose is the manifestation of His glory through the joyful love of a redeemed multitude. The love of many shall wax cold.

The fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, and peace. John wrote, God spoke, Christ came—*"that your joy may be full."* The law of God is not a penal code, but "good tidings of great joy."

There is no joy like the deep and abiding joy of the Spirit—the beauty of holiness—the glory of the divine nature. Love *cannot* grow cold as long as this picture is kept fresh and clear. If we keep reading and rereading what John wrote, seeking to constantly live in its atmosphere of divine love, our hearts and minds will be drawn upward in the joy of the Spirit. *If we are not constantly filled with an overwhelming joy, we have not yet found the truth in its fulness and beauty.*

The love of the many shall wax cold because the shadows grow thicker—the sadness and instability of natural things deepens. All things today—industrial, economic, national, and international—are at a constant crisis, a constant tension. No one is happy, no one is satisfied—and we are in great danger of absorbing this atmosphere of tension and stress.

> *"These things I write unto you THAT YOUR JOY MAY BE FULL."*

And he continues (1 Jn. 1:5)—

> *"This is the message that we have heard of him, and declare unto you—*
>
> *"That God is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all."*

This is the great message: *"God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all."* God is perfection in all goodness, and everything to do with God is on the basis of perfection. All that is out of harmony with God, is but darkness and sorrow in the end.

A joyful acceptance of this message in its fulness and depth is the first step in assuring a love that will never grow cold—a clear recognition of the great issue between good and evil, light and darkness, life and death—two ways, two camps, two services. We must decide which side we wish to be on, and bring all our life into harmony with that decision, testing all things by this rule. There are no neutrals, no middle ground, for—

> *"Whatsoever is not of faith is sin"* (Rom. 14:23).

"The thought of foolishness is sin," and all outside God's way is foolishness. In verse 6 the apostle *applies* this principle of the infinite goodness and perfection and purity of God—

> *"If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth."*

Fellowship is *unity, communion, likeness, oneness of mind and purpose, a walking together in harmony.* So to have fellowship with God, and with those who are in fellowship with God, we must walk in the light—our walk, our whole way of life,

all our thoughts and actions, must be on the high plane of harmony with the divine light and perfection.

Those who attain the Kingdom of God will be those alone who have constantly examined themselves in the light of these things. John says (v. 8)—

> *"If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us."*

Later he declares (3:9)—

> *"Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin, for His* (God's) *seed remaineth in him and he cannot sin, because he is born of God."*

To the natural mind this is contradiction, but by the mind of the Spirit we are led to see the deep wisdom and lesson of these words.

First, as John points out, perfection is the standard, and *must be the standard.*

God is *all* light. There can be no fellowship with Him except on the recognized basis of absolute perfection. The essential perfection of the sacrifice of Christ proves this.

But the more a man comprehends the beauty of holiness and the mind of the Spirit, the more he realizes the utter evilness of his own natural flesh and mind, and perfection constantly seems farther and farther away.

Any who say, or—as is much more common—who *act* on the basis, that they have no sin to worry about—that they are "doing all right"—who consider themselves quite acceptable to God—who do not realize the necessity of constant effort and constant self-examination—utterly fail to comprehend the standards of godliness and perfection that John is describing. Our highest attainments fall miserably short of the divine perfection of the beauty of holiness.

But still, "He that is born of God *cannot* sin." The thought of sin is abhorrent to him. He lives in love, in closeness to God.

Though he continually falls short of divine perfection, he continually strives toward it. His choice and desire are always in the way of Christlike gentleness and purity and love. He never condones or is satisfied with imperfection. He knows that *to ever deliberately choose the way of the flesh in anything is to wound Christ afresh, who loved him, and died for him.*

Any failure, any weakness of the flesh, immediately fills him with sorrow and remorse, and renewed determination to overcome. "He *cannot* sin."

The way of godliness is an all-pervading thing. It must continuously control and motivate the whole life, or it means nothing. It is so easy to deceive ourselves by putting on a self-gratifying front of godliness and interest in spiritual things on some occasions, and relaxing into natural fleshliness at others.

But "God is light, and in Him is *no* darkness *at all.*" To be godly is to be like God—*the same all the time*—a steady, consistent, spiritual shining, from hour to hour and day to day. Until it is *consistent*, our godliness is neither sound nor deep.

If we go through a normal day's natural activities, we are inclined to consider that we have not particularly sinned. And we are inclined, if we have accomplished a full day's work related to the Truth, to feel a flush of self-satisfaction, and our prayers tend to unconsciously take the pharisaical form of—

"I thank Thee, God, that I am not as other men are."

But the whole issue of life depends on going *deeper*—getting the true, full picture of good and evil, light and darkness. We know that the whole world lieth in darkness—wickedness. But do we realize in what way, and to what extent, this applies to *our own inner selves?* Because iniquity—lawlessness—shall abound, the love of the majority shall wax cold. What iniquity? What lawlessness? *The basic danger is the natural inner lawlessness of our own flesh.*

Very few go right down to the heart of things—few get the full, true, picture of the divine beauty of holiness and distinguish it clearly from the natural motions of the flesh.

As long as we find ourselves subject to annoyances and irritations, we have not learned the way of godliness. This is one searching test. The flesh is very adept at making excuses for its evilness, many of them quite "scientific." Books are filled with apologies for the flesh, and excuses for its viciousness. *But it is all the flesh,* and we cannot hide behind it, but rather must *overcome it* and put it to death by the power of God. Only *God's Word* gives a true picture of man. Let us get our information there.

The way of godliness consists of *making love the motive of all action.* Here is one test of how close we have attained to godliness. *No one who loves fully and scripturally gets annoyed or irritated at anyone or anything—"nothing shall offend them."*

Their basic motive of life is to bless and help. They react to every situation with kindness and sympathy and the deep

desire to do good. This does not come naturally but as the result of intelligent self-discipline under the guidance of the Spirit-Word.

When we react with annoyance, or anger, or impatience, or harshness, it is one more shameful victory for the evil motions of the flesh within us.

It is a failure and a stumbling on the way of godliness. It is a break in the patten of love that unites us with God. We step out of the divine light into the darkness.

"If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves."

The Spirit speaking through Paul to the Corinthians and John to the ecclesia at Ephesus, shows how the deceptiveness of iniquity can cause love to grow cold without any sign of outward change and without those concerned realizing it. Paul says—

> *"Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing"* (1 Cor. 13:3).

And the Son of Man to the Ephesian lightstand (Rev. 2:2-5)—

> *"I know thy works, labor, patience, how thou canst not bear them that are evil and hast borne, and hast patience, and FOR MY NAME'S SAKE hast labored and hast not fainted . . ."*
>
> *"Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast LEFT THY FIRST LOVE . . ."*
>
> *"Remember whence thou hast fallen, repent, do the first works, or I will come quickly and REMOVE THY CANDLESTICK."*

Here was a case perfectly illustrating Paul's words about the most faithful of works being meaningless if the motive for which they are done is not love of God and love of man. To all *outward* appearances the Ephesians were exemplary. Consider all the things the Son of Man gives them credit for doing *"for his Name's sake."* But *still* he threatens quick destruction if they do not reawake to their *first love.*

They had gradually lost sight of their original foundation. Iniquity, the robust offspring of the flesh, had gradually increased its foothold in the form of pride, or self-satisfaction, or ambition, or combativeness, or some other fleshly motive for doing spiritual things, or just plain thoughtless habit, and had choked out love, the delicate fruit of the Spirit. Satan, masking as an angel of light, had deceived the very elect. But the Son of Man, who reads the innermost hearts, was not deceived.

The solemn lesson is that we must constantly examine our own motives, for just *doing* is not enough. On every occasion we must honestly ask ourselves *why* we do what we do—examine our hearts as to whether a Christlike love, kindness and gentleness is our motive and the Spirit is our instructor and guide. Often, if we truly search our hearts, we shall find that our supposed good actions have purely fleshly roots. In fact, this will *always* be so except where there is a conscious reining in of the flesh and a deliberate applying of the law of the Spirit, for *"In the flesh dwells no good thing"* (Rom. 7:18).

We must, guided by the instruction of the Spirit, devise tests to expose the deception. If we are self-willed in our good deeds, impatient of criticism or opposition, if we insist on it being done *our* way, if we self-righteously regard ourselves as carrying the burden for others, if any anger or bitterness enters our mind, if our basic approach to others' views is not patience and a sympathetic desire to understand, *then love is not our motive.* We do not have the spiritual picture. We are yet carnal.

It is so easy to gratify our pride and increase our self-esteem by doing things for others and for the Truth. But the great and essential work is *within*—overcoming our *own flesh.*

So often it sadly works the other way—the more a man does for others and *supposedly* for God, the less godly he becomes in the all-important matter of inner self-control and the true, yielding gentleness of humility.

* * *

At the end of Matthew 24, the chapter in which he speaks of love waxing cold because of iniquity, Jesus gives some details of the manifestation of this cold love condition.

He speaks particularly of the time of the end, of the time of the Master of the Household returning, and the conditions he finds in his household.

He mentions three specific aspects of love growing cold, in the attitude he presents of the unfaithful servant class—

"My Lord delayeth his coming."
Smiting the fellow-servants.
Eating and drinking with the drunken.

These then are three trends to be particularly watched for and guarded against in the last days.

"My Lord delayeth his coming."

Right from the days of bro. Thomas, the Christadelphian body has been on the verge of expectancy, eager for the Lord's return. And the gradual development of the prophetic picture

toward Armageddon has heightened that expectancy. This has been a distinguishing mark of Christadelphians, quite amusing to the world.

But today we increasingly hear it said, almost apologetically, as if ashamed of the former simple enthusiasm, "It cannot be for some time yet, there is more prophecy to be fulfilled first, things are not ready"—"My Lord delayeth his coming." This is becoming the fashionable viewpoint among the "many." Surely this in itself is one of the most striking signs of the end!

* * *

"And shall begin to smite his fellowservants."

What are we to look for here? To smite is to injure and abuse, to harm. The Ecclesia of Christ is intended, above all things, to manifest an unearthly, mutual love. Jesus says—

"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (Jn. 13:35).

Here is the one great distinguishing mark of discipleship. This is a matter of vital importance. There is far too much pettiness and criticism and touchiness and coldness and childishness and self-justification among those claiming the Name of Christ. *Such conditions do not exist among his true disciples.* They are the mark of the unfaithful servant. Christ's brethren are large-hearted—*nothing* offends them.

It is often those who speak most loudly of "love" who are the most harsh and bitter toward those who do not agree with them. Let us make sure that we few separated ones at least clearly manifest this beautiful mark of discipleship among ourselves!

* * *

"And to eat and drink with the drunken."

Generally, this means an indulging in, and joining in, things outside the associations and principles of the Truth.

It speaks of joining with false doctrine, for that is often represented under the figure of wine and drunkenness.

It speaks of joining in the activities and amusements of the world, for these, too, come under the scriptural heading of drunkenness and revelry.

It is so easy in these prosperous days to be carried away by the intoxication of the present—to eat and drink with the drunken—not only by the world's endlessly increasing pleasures and entertainments, but also by the pressure of daily work and the endless complications of modern life.

Above all, perhaps, it speaks of a state of confusion and intoxication—having the senses dulled and blurred—losing the clear distinction of the Truth—the fading of the recognition of the urgency of a clear, firm stand—a general lowering of the standards and burial of differences and general amalgamation—*loss of the sense of the importance of clear separation from error.*

"They that sleep sleep in the night, and they that be drunken are drunken in the night . . ."

"But ye are all children of the light, and of the day . . . Let us watch and be sober."

"God is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all."

The days are evil, but there will be a faithful remnant found awake to meet the Lord—a strange, holy, separate few—perfected in patience and love—sober, grave and diligent in the midst of the general intoxication of the night, for Jesus says—

"Blessed is that servant whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find watching."

Could Ye Not Watch One Hour?

"Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matt. 26:41).

MATTHEW CHAPTER TWENTY SIX

Our daily readings have brought us around again to a very wonderful chapter—Matthew 26. It contains many incidents, and many people are involved. We are herein given, by the all-wise and infallible inspiration of the Spirit of God, the inner background of the most important event of all history. We are shown the inward relationship of these people to one another and to the strange and tragic and glorious course of events in which each played a part.

There is much mortal failure—much human weakness—much fleshly evil. It is the same old story of common, small, meaningless, human vileness and intrigue—repeated over and over in history—*except for one man*—one man who gives the whole picture meaning and power and beauty.

Here is the turning point in history: the faithfulness, and the courage, and the victory, of this one man.

We see the rulers of the Jews, the Romans, Pilate, the common Jewish multitude, the one woman who understood, and anointed Jesus for burial, the disciples, Judas, Peter, John.

And, above all, Christ himself—the one pure, solid, godly element throughout all this interplay of fleshly strife and human weakness.

* * *

"When Jesus had finished all these sayings" (v. 1).

This was the end of his public ministry—just as in Matthew 5:7 we see its beginning. How did it end? What were "all these sayings"?

We glance back to the previous chapter (25)—the Parable of the Ten Virgins—oil, light, knowledge, understanding, separation, spirituality.

The Parable of the Talents—labor, service, devotion, dedication—"always abounding in the work of the Lord."

The Parable of the Judgment Seat—the sheep and the goats—"Come, ye blessed"—"Depart ye cursed!" On what basis?—*on what we have or have not done for others.*

"The Son of Man is betrayed to be crucified" (v. 2).

He spoke very plainly—they heard and they answered, but they never really comprehended.

Like children, they heard the words, but saw no depth of significance. He was very much alone—this was part of the terrible ordeal.

* * *

"Then assembled together the chief priests and the scribes and the elders";

"And consulted that they might take Jesus by subtlety and kill him" (vs. 3-4).

They thought they were serving God. They thought they were protecting the nation. They said—

"It is better that one man die, than that the whole nation perish."

They were hypocrites, but to a large extent unconsciously and blindly. How easy this is for the flesh! They would lead their cattle to water on the Sabbath, or lift them from a pit, but a man could not be healed on the Sabbath—that was wickedness!

It is so easy to self-righteously serve the flesh and think we are serving God. What is the solution? How can we avoid this error?

Study and prayer—constant self-examination by the light of the Spirit-Word. The answer, the guidance, the safety, is there, if we seek it humbly and constantly as the *first thing in our lives*. There is no other way.

* * *

"But they said, Not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar among the people" (v. 5).

But it HAD to be on the feast day. It was so ordained from the foundation of the world—the Passover Lamb—the blood on the doorposts. So their hand was forced, and what they tried to avoid was thrust upon them.

* * *

Verse 6 is a complete change of scene—but a basic part of the picture. Bethany—Mary—the precious ointment—the preparation for his burial.

Mary, who had sat at his feet, seemed to be the only one who realized what was happening.

The Psalms reveal the heart and mind of Christ through all this ordeal. Psalm 69 is clearly a crucifixion Psalm—it speaks of the gall and vinegar (v. 20)—

"Reproach hath broken my heart. I am full of heaviness."

"I looked for some to take pity, but there was none";
"And for comforters, but I found none."

Mary's loving and understanding ministration supplied a vital need at this point, like the angels later in the Garden—

"There came to him a woman"

—Mary, the sister of Martha (see Jn. 12:3)—

". . . having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head" (v. 7).

The men failed completely to comprehend, but a few women felt the deep current of events—this Mary, and his mother Mary, and Mary Magdalene.

But immediately there was a sour note (v. 8)—

"When his disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste?"

Judas was the spokesman and ringleader, because he was a thief and bare the bag (Jn. 12:6). But clearly the other disciples, too, were carried away with small-minded, self-righteous condemnation.

How easy and natural and satisfying to the flesh to condemn others who are doing far more for Christ than we are!

They may even be doing it unsoundly and misguidedly in ignorance. Our knowledge may be greater, but what hypocrisy to do LESS than they, and still to criticize!

Christ turned her condemnation to an everlasting memorial of praise (v. 13)—

"Verily I say unto you, wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this that this woman hath done be told for a memorial of her."

* * *

"Then Judas went unto the chief priests" (v. 14).

The incident of the anointing seems to have brought things to a head in Judas. It would powerfully affect him in two ways—

1. The 300 pence—he was a thief;
2. The rebuke—the setback—the reference to the burial.

Judas was much more acute than the other simple disciples. He appears to have had the greatest natural ability and capacity and maturity. A man who, in such intimate contact, could maintain such perfect deception for three years was not an ordinary man.

Ahithophel was the Old Testament type of Judas. He was to David as Judas to Christ. Ahithophel was a man of great natural wisdom. We learn much about Judas from the Psalms and the story of Ahithophel.

When the turning-point came, Ahithophel perceived it immediately. He saw the handwriting on the wall—and went and hanged himself. Doubtless the anointing incident told Judas the same thing—Christ was not going to be a king but a sacrifice.

Why did Judas follow Christ? And why did Christ choose Judas? Christ said long before that Judas was a devil. He knew from the beginning Judas would betray him (Jn. 6:64).

The picture we get in the Psalms tells us Judas was consistently, deliberately, evil and calculating. This was no sudden weakness or mere fleshly stumbling.

This was callous, premeditated self-interest. Judas clearly followed Christ for what he could get. He could see Christ as the Messiah and himself a ruler in Israel, when this long-awaited Messiah asserted his divine claim. He had the general Jewish expectation of what the Messiah would do.

He was prudent, competent, discerning, but selfish and worldly. He sought a crown, but not a cross.

We, too, can be Christ's for the same reason—selfish, personal advantage. If we are not Christ's for just pure love of Christ, we are but Judases, and if someone offered us more we would switch. We must be Christ's for Christ's sake alone, without thought of self.

Judas was a hardened criminal. Psalms 69 and 109 reveal this. He was a thief. He was a practiced and accomplished hypocrite. He brazenly asked, "Is it I?" at the table. What cool, unfeeling, heartless self-possession!

And then the kiss in the Garden. A man with the slightest grain of goodness or decency would surely have chosen a less vicious and hypocritical method of betrayal.

But why did Christ choose such a man for a close companion?—and so treat him for three years that none of the disciples suspected him, even when told there was a traitor in their midst?

Two purposes were served. Jesus said (Jn. 13:18)—

> *"I know whom I have chosen, but THAT THE SCRIPTURE MAY BE FULFILLED—"*
>
> *"He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me."*

A traitor was needed, so a traitor—a vessel of dishonor—was chosen.

Secondly, it was part of the trial and perfecting of Christ's character. He was "made perfect through suffering." He said (Matt. 5:44)—

"Love your enemies, bless them that curse you. Do good to them that hate you."

Surely there could be no more striking example! The mind of Christ in Psalm 109 records (vs. 4-5)—

"For my love they are my adversaries, but I gave myself unto prayer."

"They have rewarded me evil for good, and HATRED FOR MY LOVE."

Verses 8-16 of this Psalm, quoted by Peter in Acts 1:20, show that it applies to these very circumstances of Jesus and Judas.

* * *

"And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver."

The paltriness of the reward adds to the despicableness of the crime. It shows his value of God's most precious and valuable gift to man—like Esau, the "profane person," who sold his birthright for a mess of pottage.

* * *

"And they made ready the Passover" (v. 19).

Luke records that Jesus said—

"With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer" (Lk. 22:15).

And John says of the same occasion (Jn. 13:1)—

"Having loved his own, which were in the world, he loved them to the end."

Even in his agony he did not forget or neglect his infinite love for them.

* * *

"And as they did eat, he said, Verily I say unto you that one of you shall betray me" (v. 21).

And everyone said, "Is it I?"—Judas along with the rest. Was there nothing in all those three years that Judas had done that would cause them to suspect, nor in all Jesus' relationships with Judas? What a marvelous testimony to the impartial love Jesus had shown to his secret enemy among them! Psalm 41:9 says—

"Yea, mine own familiar friend in whom I trusted hath lifted up his heel against me!"

How could Jesus *trust* him if he *knew* from the beginning he would betray him?

Clearly it means that he *treated* him with the same trust that he treated the others. He made no distinction, though he knew what he would do. There is a great lesson for us here in our treatment of others.

There is another reason why the disciples did not suspect Judas. The outward difference between him and them was not as great as we might suppose.

Truly they were basically sincere and he was not. But they were very childish and fleshly and self-centered and uncomprehending—until the shock and sorrow of the cross made them men. In the Temple on one of those last terrible days, Jesus had been speaking of many deep and beautiful things. And as they walked out together, his disciples said, in simple, uncomprehending, childlike wonder (Mk. 13:1)—

"Look at these great big stones, and beautiful buildings!"

How would Jesus feel?

And we find in Luke that right after he tells them that one of them will betray him, they are quarreling among themselves who shall be greatest in the Kingdom—right at the last supper, when Jesus was in his agony of love and sorrow.

They sorrowed, like sympathetic but unrealizing children, when he spoke of betrayal and death, but they were soon too preoccupied with their own selfish rivalry to remember what he had said.

It was then that Jesus girded himself with a towel, and washed their feet.

"Having loved his own, he loved them to the end"

—not for what they were, but in faith for what they would be when they grew up.

* * *

"All ye shall be offended because of me this night" (v. 31).

Peter said, with the infinite assurance of immaturity and inexperience (v. 33)—

"Though all shall be offended, yet will I never be!"

And Jesus answered (v. 34)—

"This night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice."

And Peter said, in vehement denial (v. 35)—

"Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee!"

And so said they all.

How sure they were of themselves! How little need they saw for preparation and prayer! Yet how pitifully soon they failed!

Then (v. 36) they came to Gethsemane, and leaving the rest of the disciples he took Peter, James, and John a little further. And he asked them (v. 38) to watch while he prayed. And he went a little from them, and prayed—

* * *

"O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.

Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt" (v. 39).

Did he not KNOW that the cup *must* be drunk? That—as he himself had said—for this purpose, all that he had done previously was but the preparing?

Why then would he ask it to be removed? Was this weakness? Rebellion? Lack of faith? Why did he not accept what he knew must be? And not once, but three times over, he so prayed.

The answer is that he was "made perfect"—complete—whole—prepared—ready—"by suffering." He "learned obedience by the things he suffered" (Heb. 5:8-9).

He had to be developed. He had to learn. Truly he was well pleasing to God in all things at all times, but he still had to be trained and taught and developed by trial and suffering.

We see in the Garden the last great lesson being learned—the last great trial being experienced. We see in this threefold plea—these "strong crying and tears" (Heb. 5:7)—the reality of the struggle and the bitter agony of the development.

Mark records an expression he used on this occasion that makes these pleas easier to understand—

"Father, all things are possible for Thee!"

This indeed is true. He had often said so himself. He had spoken of the irresistible power of the faith and prayer of a righteous man, and truly he was righteous. All things are possible—why cannot this cup pass? Why cannot it be done another way?

But each time he came through conflict to the peace of obedience, resignation, and acceptance—

"Thy will, not mine, be done."

There is no sin in the great struggle within. There is no sin in strong desire and hope. But always, at the end, we must each come through to the same conclusion—

"Thy will, not mine, be done."

It is often very hard, but there is no other way. And truly in our hearts we would desire no other way, for we know God's way is best.

* * *

Each time he came from prayer, he found them sleeping. How vitally he needed the comfort and strength of understanding companionship! But it was not to be. He must tread the winepress completely alone. His dependence must be wholly upon God.

Luke says they were sleeping from sorrow. Truly they could not help but sorrow for his sorrow, though they understood it not. But they could not watch with him. They did not realize how much their support would have meant to him. They had always leaned and depended on him as being of inexhaustible strength.

To Peter he said especially—

"Could ye not watch with me one hour?" (v. 40)

It was a gentle warning to Peter to examine his own strength and doubt his own assurance, and seek help before it was too late. But Peter, in his blind self-confidence, did not heed.

"Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (v. 41).

This is the key passage of the chapter. Here the whole lesson and meaning of the chapter is focused—

"Watch—and pray."

They were not prepared, and therefore they failed. They were caught unawares.

They were brave men—Peter did not hesitate to draw his sword to take on a multitude.

They were devoted men—they were ready to die with Christ, and they truly meant it.

They were dedicated men—they had left all to follow him.

They were independently-minded men—they chose a hard and lonely path, contrary to the whole nation and its leaders.

They were spiritually-minded men—for they perceived that Christ alone had the words of eternal life.

But they were not prepared. They thought they were ready for everything. They thoughtlessly trusted their own strength.

They did not realize the constant application of prayer and meditation necessary for strengthening the spirit for the ordeal which must sooner or later come to all.

"And they all forsook him and fled" (v. 56).

Christ himself was far stronger and more prepared than they, but he never relied on himself. He applied himself constantly to prayer. We read at other times that, as they slept, he continued all night in prayer to God.

Here lay his secret and his strength, built slowly through long, weary hours of vigil and supplication—the strength they thought they could duplicate so easily upon demand.

Can we, too, be so thoughtlessly foolish?—taking our own strength for granted, instead of constantly bending every effort to seek divine reinforcement against the day of temptation—

"WATCH—and PRAY."

We must realize NOW the urgency of the command. When the test comes, it is too late to prepare.

* * *

The chapter closes with Peter's violent threefold denial of Christ. What humiliation and remorse after such boastful confidence! He truly had been ready to fight for Christ, but the command to "Put up the sword" and the warning that—

"All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword" (v. 52).

—found him wholly unprepared.

If he had watched and prayed in the Garden with Christ, instead of sleeping, perhaps he would have been ready—but he had to learn a different, harder way.

Peter had to learn to listen and accept. His devotion was impulsive and thoughtless and self-confident. When Christ spoke of the necessity of his sacrifice, trying to prepare the disciples' minds, Peter instead of listening and learning said—

"No—I know better—it must be the way I think."

He thought it was devotion, but it was really self-assertion and presumption. Then when Christ was about to wash his feet, and teach him something, again he said—

"No—I know better—thou shalt never wash my feet!"

And when Christ said—

"If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me"

—it STILL had to be Peter's way, not Christ's—

"No—I know better—not my feet only, but my hands and my head."

He thought it was devotion, and truly it was, but it was a devotion that had to learn how to learn. Peter wanted to be spectacular in his devotion. He wanted to walk on the water, like Christ. He would have been wiser to wait in the boat with the rest.

We must learn the lesson well, if we wish to be useful in God's purpose, and accepted by Him. We must learn to carefully LISTEN, and to carefully OBEY.

Careful, thoughtful, self-examining, patient *obedience* is the only true devotion. There are millions filled with self-satisfied devotion, going about to establish their own righteousness by great deeds for Christ—self-confidently following their own will, and self-assuredly dictating to God the way of life, as Peter did to Christ.

But very few are prepared to submit to God's way—to stop, and think, and study, and meditate, and learn God's desire in every little, careful detail. These are the few alone whom God will save—

> *"Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."*

Woman, Why Weepest Thou?

"Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene" (Jn. 19:25).

We meet each first day of the week to remember the death and resurrection of our Lord, and twice each year we read together four accounts of the events of this period, in the four gospels.

Let us consider these events, endeavoring to arrange them in order in our minds, and to picture the experiences and circumstances of each individual involved.

Let us begin our consideration at the foot of the cross.

* * *

The thing that first strikes us very forcibly is the prominence of women and the apparent absence of all but one of the men connected with Christ.

At the betrayal in the garden, nine disciples flee and we hear no more about them until after the resurrection.

The other two, John and Peter, after first fleeing with the rest, turned and followed the crowd to the High Priest's house. John was known at the High Priest's house, and therefore must have been known to be a disciple of Jesus. The High Priest's maidservant remembered seeing Peter with Jesus; she surely would have remembered seeing John with him, as she knew John. This is a point in John's favor. He went right in along with Jesus, knowing he would be recognized. We find John outstanding all through these events.

After Peter's denial, he too, like the rest of the apostles, drops out of the picture until after the resurrection. There is no mention of Peter or of any of the rest at the cross—only John and the women. All the women closest to Jesus are mentioned by name by Matthew, Mark and John, as being there.

* * *

John stood at the foot of the cross, with Jesus' mother, and received the commission to take care of her.

There also was Salome, the wife of Zebedee and mother of James and John. Comparing Matthew 27:56 and Mark 15:40 with John 19:25 almost certainly establishes Salome as the sister of Mary. This would make James and John the cousins of Jesus. The only other alternatives are—

Mary's sister is mentioned once, (John 19:25) but not named, or ever referred to elsewhere.

Mary's sister was also named Mary, and was the wife of Cleophas.

In either case, Salome would be omitted from one record where she appears in the other two. In the first case, someone else is mentioned in her place who is never mentioned again. In the second case, there were two sisters, both named Mary. All this seems very unlikely, so we conclude that Salome was "his (Jesus') mother's sister" of John 19:25.

It was Salome who approached Jesus with the request that her two sons, James and John, sit on Jesus' right and left hands in the Kingdom. We will have a better and kinder view of Salome if we remember in connection with this incident that she was one of the faithful band of women who followed Jesus wherever he went, ministering unto him in loving devotion of their own substance.

Matthew says (27:55), regarding the crucifixion scene that:

"Many women were there . . . which followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him."

We can hardly interpret "many" as much less than fifteen or twenty, and it would seem to imply more. Let us try to get the picture. Besides these women, as Jesus traveled about, there were the twelve disciples, and a certain number of others. We know there were at least more than two others, and probably many more, for in Acts 1, Peter says—

"Of these men which have companied with us all the time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us . . . must one be ordained a witness."

And of this group they appointed two to be chosen between by lot to fill Judas' place.

I am trying to formulate some mental picture of the group that accompanied Jesus. It could hardly have been less than forty or fifty. It could have been much more. We know on at least one occasion Jesus sent out seventy to preach.

What a strange sight it must have been. What an object of ridicule to the learned and sophisticated! They were of the simplest and commonest of the people. We know how limited their understanding was, right to the end. And while they were utterly devoted to Jesus, yet to the end they were small-minded and the best of them disputed who should be first.

What a background for the manifestation of God's Son! What a naturally-speaking humiliating and unimpressing presentation he made! The intellectual of the nation said in scorn, looking disdainfully at this motley, itinerant company—

"Have any of the rulers believed in him?"

They would seem like gypsies, wandering about the countryside, with no apparent means of support, and no fixed abode—nothing normal or respectable about them.

And furthermore he did not hesitate to company with publicans and sinners. He recognized no social distinction—no normal standards of propriety. He violated all their artificial etiquette—he did not even wash his hands to eat.

He did not work. He did not support himself. He allowed these (as it would seem) infatuated women to minister to him of their substance.

We remember his first temptation—"Make these stones bread." He had all the power at his command. He did not need to humiliate himself, and give such an appearance to the world by depending upon the ministrations and possessions of the simple women who followed him.

Only two classes could possibly be attracted to him—the very simple, and those with deep spiritual discernment who could see through all the externals to the reality within.

How beautiful it was that he who had all the power at his command must not use it for his own simplest needs, but must embarrassingly depend upon devoted women who had left their households and who followed and ministered to him with loving care! How beautiful that he should be permitted to need them and depend upon them!—He—the Son of God, the potential Lord of Heaven and Earth!

How strange and beautiful are the ways of God! How utterly and refreshingly different from the ways of men!

And so "many" loving and devoted women were there at the cross, but—as far as we have any record—only one man, "the disciple whom Jesus loved."

The men were later to carry the burden; and the women, as their position is, were to drop entirely out of sight, but this was their day, their glory, their courage and devotion and service—eternal testimony of love and faithfulness.

When Paul later lists the appearances of the risen Lord, he does not even mention the appearances to the women, though the first two appearances were to them.

Does he slight them? By no means! Rather he honors them. These appearances were not public witnesses. They were the far more glorious inner, personal, intimate communions of fellowship and love. The woman's great privilege is the gentle, inner, silent, secret touch.

Beside Jesus' mother, and Salome her sister, there was also Mary the wife of Cleophas and mother of the apostle James the Less, another who traveled with Jesus, and ministered to him.

Three elderly women, standing by the cross, witnessed that almost unendurable scene of agony and shame, with hopeless bewilderment and disappointed faith. Faith and Hope had fled, but Love remained.

* * *

And then there was Mary Magdalene. Mary Magdalene is clearly the leading and most active spirit among the faithful group of women. For three days—the most momentous three days of history—Mary Magdalene is the most prominent actor in the whole divine plan.

How strange and beautiful that this fearless devoted woman should suddenly come briefly into brilliant prominence and, then as quickly fade forever from the record! She filled one essential, central role in the great sweep of history, and then retired to womanly obscurity.

Mary Magdalene—the last at the cross, and the first at the tomb. And her devotion was rewarded—she was the first to see the Lord.

When we come right down to the very heart of the events of these three days—around which all history revolves—we come to two people—Mary Magdalene and John the beloved disciple.

True, John at first fled. "They ALL forsook him and fled." It *had* to be that way. The flesh must learn the deep wisdom of its weakness—its utter, powerless dependence upon God. But John recovered himself immediately.

Peter "followed afar off," drawn by an irresistible love, but held back by the dragging feet of a terrible, trembling fear.

But John, we are told, "went in with Jesus into the palace of the High Priest"; then later went out and brought in Peter. It was John who said, "Perfect love casteth out fear."

John was the last to whom Jesus spoke in the hour of death: "Behold thy mother."

Mary was the first to whom he spoke in the hour of Resurrection and Life—the first name he uttered beyond the grave.

How little we know of Mary! Her name occurs twelve times—eleven times in connection with the events of the crucifixion and *only once* anywhere else. That one place is Luke 8:2, where we are told she was among those who went about with Jesus on his journeys, and ministered to him. We are told there, too, that Jesus had cast seven demons out of Mary—

that is, he had cured her of some terrible and overwhelming infirmity.

* * *

At the close of the crucifixion day, two other men come into the picture—men whom we would never have dreamed would fill the role they filled.

Of one of them, Joseph of Arimathea, we have never heard before, and never hear of him again. We are told he was rich, he was a counsellor, that is, one of the ruling body of the nation—like a member of Congress or of Parliament, that he was a good and righteous man who looked for the Kingdom of God, that he was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews.

Up to this point he had never publicly revealed his allegiance. He had lived a double life—an inner, private life and an outer, public one.

There is a great lesson and a great comfort in the example of Joseph. He was rich and influential—he had much to lose in following Jesus, and up to this point he had not been able to face the open choice.

But when Jesus was dead, when all hope seemed ended, he gathered together a Faith and a Courage that stand out with almost unique brilliance, and went boldly to Pilate, requesting the body of Jesus! Something now so moved and took hold of this fearful man that he stood up boldly and alone before both the Romans and his whole nation and publicly allied himself with the cause of Christ, just when that cause had come into direct collision with both Jews and Romans and seemed to have ended in utter disaster.

We wonder whether, and at what point, Joseph realized that he was fulfilling that strange, unlikely prophecy of Isaiah 53—

"He shall make his grave with the rich."

Truly a prophecy which—up until the moment Joseph stepped forth—seemed impossible of fulfillment under the circumstances.

How marvellous are the ways of God! Let Joseph be a perpetual inspiration to all who have ever hesitated under any circumstances to speak out for Christ because of fear.

Joseph laid the body in his own new tomb—a tomb wherein never man had lain. In the fittingness of things, it could be no other way. This event was not only unique in all history—it was the very center of all history.

At long last, in the fulness of times, the grave was to be conquered. A path never before opened up was to be trod—a path of hope right through the hitherto hopeless valley of the shadow of death, and out the other side.

No man had passed this way before.

True, there had been typical raisings from the dead before in manifestation and shadow of what was to come, but never a Resurrection that shattered the power of the grave and cast off its shackles forever. Never man had passed this way before—no man had ever lain in *this* tomb—this glorious gateway from death to life.

* * *

The other man was Nicodemus—likewise a counselor—two of the highest men in the nation. And, like Joseph, he had apparently up to this point been held back by fear from open discipleship. Unlike Joseph, he appears twice before in the record.

At the beginning of Jesus' ministry, Nicodemus comes to him by night, confessing his recognition that Jesus was a teacher sent from God.

Though he chides him for lack of understanding basic spiritual truth, though holding a position as the teacher of Israel, still Jesus speaks to him many things of depth and beauty like we find revealed nowhere else. He knew what was in man, and he could doubtless see in Nicodemus the nucleus of a faith that would overcome all fear.

Consider the well-known passages of eternal promise and beauty that Jesus spoke alone to this Jewish leader who sought him in the night. The event is recorded in John 3—

"Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God."

"The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth. So is every one that is born of the Spirit."

"No man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man which is in heaven."

"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up."

"God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life."

"This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light."

For all this we are indebted to Jesus' private conversation with this man Nicodemus in the quiet of the night. And Jesus ended the interview with this gentle rebuke, doubtless long-remembered with much heart-searching and self-examination, and which bore glorious fruit so long after—

"He that doeth Truth cometh to the Light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God."

Nicodemus was at last to come in the open daylight—in full public gaze—to manifest his allegiance to Light and Truth.

There is one other mention of him, apparently about six months before the Crucifixion. It is very revealing, both as to how far he went, and how far he did not go.

The officers were sent to seize Jesus at the Feast of Tabernacles. They came back to the chief priests empty-handed and overawed, exclaiming—

"Never man spake like this man!" (Jn. 7:46)

The Pharisees contemptuously answer—

"Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him?"

Nicodemus was there. He was one of them. What were his thoughts in the face of this contemptuous challenge? This was just a few months before the Crucifixion. He had had three years to ponder on the words of Jesus, whom he had confessed to be a teacher sent from God.

He does speak up. Truly very mildly and timidly and uncommittingly from the point of view of a robust faith, but he does speak out against them—

"Doth our law judge any man before it hear him?"

And they all turn on him in scathing ridicule—

"Art thou also of Galilee?"

But finally, at the last moment possible, Nicodemus' secret faith burst forth in loving, fearless, public service to the dead body of a condemned and executed prisoner.

* * *

Two women are watching as these two men, these two well-known rulers of the Jews, but doubtless strangers personally to them, carefully take down the body, prepare it for burial and carry it a little way into a tomb nearby. They were Mary Magdalene and the "other Mary," that is, the wife of Cleophas.

Finally, after seeing the stone rolled against the entrance, they returned home and prepared spices and ointments, and rested the Sabbath day.

All this, from the death of Jesus on the cross—the begging of the body from Pilate, the removal from the cross, the burial and the preparation of spices, had to happen between three o'clock and six o'clock on Friday afternoon, before the Sabbath began.

There has always been controversy concerning what day of the week Jesus was crucified. Many, on the basis of a full three-day interpretation, and by a double-Sabbath theory (Passover Sabbath and weekly Sabbath), move the crucifixion back to Thursday and some even Wednesday.

But bro. Thomas' beautiful exposition of the Son of Man fulfilling the work given him to do by the Friday night, "resting according to the commandment" during the Sabbath, and arising the first day of a new week to a new life and a new work, strongly inclines us to the simple view that the crucifixion was on Friday.

* * *

The women appear to have bought more spices on Saturday evening, after the Sabbath was ended. Then, very early Sunday morning, they came to the tomb to perform more fully and carefully the service hurriedly rendered by Joseph and Nicodemus on Friday afternoon.

The four women named as coming are those same faithful ones who remained close to Jesus right up to the moment of death—Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the Less, Salome, mother of James and John, and Joanna, wife of Chuza, who was steward to Herod. (The word "steward" implies the position of general manager of the household like Eleazar of Damacus in Abraham's household). We are told that "other women" also were with them.

The mention of the time of day is quite specific, and unquestionably purposeful. They appear to have left home while it was still dark, and to have arrived at the tomb just after the sun had risen.

John speaks of, "While it was yet dark"; Mark says, "At the rising of the sun"; Matthew says, "As it began to dawn."

Two parts of the record give the strong impression, doubtless intentionally, that the Resurrection itself occurred very close to the same time, possibly between the time they left home in the dark and the time they arrived at the sepulchre as the dawn was breaking.

Matthew (28:2) mentions the opening of the tomb *after* describing the women leaving home, and as a *present*, connected event, not a past one; and Matthew again (28:11) also specifically says the watch came into the city with their report just as the women were going to tell his disciples, as if they had waited for them to leave.

Everything seems to happen very closely together, and the natural impression from the record is that the Resurrection had just occurred and the watch were lying in a stunned condition nearby when the women visited the tomb.

* * *

All four records mention Mary Magdalene first among those who visited the tomb. John mentions no one else.

Combining the records seems to give this sequence of events:

As they approach, they are questioning among themselves how they are going to remove the great stone blocking the entrance. It would be a large flat, round stone like a wheel that was rolled in a groove and dropped into a small depression in front of the entrance.

It seemed to be a very serious obstacle, but as so often happens, when they reached the spot they found the obstacle had been removed, the worry needless, the problem nonexistent.

According to John, Mary Magdalene—before the angels revealed themselves—seems to have run immediately to tell Peter and John that the tomb had been opened.

(We cannot help but wonder why these two disciples did not accompany the women in the first place, especially in view of the problem of moving the stone. Why did the women go alone? What were the disciples doing? What was their state of mind?)

Perhaps the circumstances are purposely designed to make us think deeply upon the state of mind of Jesus' followers during this terrible period.

They had not only suddenly lost—under violent, tragic circumstances—the one who was the focus of their deepest love and devotion. This would be of itself a terrible shock.

But their whole world had been shattered. They had left ALL and followed him. They had put all their faith and hope—all their very life—on and in him—all their dreams for future, eternal divine blessing. Everything of them and in them was bound up in him, whom they had regarded as the very Son of God.

For over three years they had enjoyed to the full his wonderful, sustaining presence, seen his countless miracles and manifestations of power, seen him put the nation's rulers to helpless confusion and humiliated silence time and again, while all the people thronged him and marvelled at him.

Then suddenly it all collapsed. Suddenly everything went dark, and began to violently close in on them. In a brief, terrible, unprepared-for fifteen hours, he was seized, abused, mocked, humiliated, and destroyed. And the whole weight of the long-infuriated and now triumphantly-revengeful wrath of the rulers would be turned against them—his closest followers.

We remember that when Jesus revealed himself to them they were assembled trembling, behind locked doors, "for fear of the Jews." Surely everything indicated that they had good reason to fear.

But the fear would not be the major aspect of their condition. The major aspect would be shock, terrible shock at the loss of their beloved Master, and the end of all they had built upon him.

Why was such a trial permitted? Why were their understandings previously veiled so they should not be ready?

The simple answer is: It was necessary. They had to be tried, torn, twisted, crushed to the utmost.

All of us, in our own small way, have experienced the transforming power of a great emotional shock. It searches the soul, it opens up the mind to its foundations, it rearranges all the courses of nature and sets things going in an entirely different direction. It is hard, but it is wholesome. It shakes out the dross from the mind, and makes men bigger and better.

From this time forward, these are all different men. It is as if they have passed through a violent metamorphosis, and henceforth are an entirely new type of creature. The old man died, and the new man found his strength. Henceforth, they stand fearlessly before the rulers. Henceforth, they go fearlessly to prison and to death.

The double shock of Death and Resurrection appears to have been the divine means for effecting this transformation—this sudden growth from children to men.

Let us learn the lesson well, that we may yield ourselves completely to the Divine Hand and in the fierce crucible of sorrow, find the glories of spirit birth.

The record focuses our attention upon the women, led by Mary Magdalene—overwhelmed by the dreadful shock and sorrow, but still doing, in love, that one last, pitifully hopeless service that it was in their power to do.

Mary Magdalene has run away to tell Peter and John of the strange new development. Did it mean a last bitter, mocking disappointment, or dared they permit their crushed hearts to court further pain by opening them up to a ray of hope?

Peter and John rushed to the tomb.

* * *

In the meantime at the tomb two angels had appeared to the other women in dazzling brightness, with the strange greeting—

"Why seek ye the living among the dead? Remember how he spoke unto you . . . that he should rise again the third day . . ."

"AND THEY REMEMBERED HIS WORDS."

This was the turning point.

From here on the glorious picture rapidly opens up wider and wider.

They fled from the tomb. "Trembling, astonishment, fear, and great joy," is how their state of mind is described.

* * *

Peter and John, running, arrive soon after they depart, with Mary following them. John gets there first, stops, and looks in. Peter catches up and goes straight into the tomb. He sees the linen clothes, and the head napkin by itself. There is great significance in this reference in the grave clothes and their position.

The word for "napkin"—*soudarion*—means literally "sweat-cloth." We remember the priests could not wear wool, because it caused sweat. Their garments must be all linen.

The name of this napkin, and its being specifically distinguished from the *"linen* clothes." strongly points to its being of wool. Linen is a symbol of spirit, as distinguished from the wool, or animal.

* * *

John followed Peter in, and saw the garments and, it is recorded, he "believed." HERE IS THE FIRST RECORDED BELIEF.

Truly, the women ran from the tomb in an excited state of "fear and great joy" at the sight and message of the angels, but here is the first specific record of belief—calm mental convic-

tion—and it was without the help of any supernatural message or appearance.

This was the disciple Jesus loved. Not having seen, he believed. Jesus appeared specially and specifically to Peter, and to his own brother James, but there is no record of an appearance to John.

Peter needed the comfort, James the conviction; but the beloved disciple was given the privilege of believing without seeing. He was honored by the recognition that his faith need not rest on sight.

* * *

John and Peter left the tomb and went to their homes, leaving Mary Magdalene alone at the tomb, weeping. As she wept, she stooped down to look into the sepulchre, and she saw two angels who said, "Why weepest thou?"

She said, "Because they have taken away my Lord." Mary's heart had been set on that last loving service to the body of her beloved.

Turning from the tomb, she saw Jesus behind her, but did not know him. He too said, "Woman, why weepest thou?"—his first recorded words beyond the grave.

We cannot help but be struck by the typical aspect of the scene, as of Christ and the Bride—"Woman, why weepest thou?"

The long travail is over. The Seed has been born of the Spirit. "In sorrow shalt thou bring forth."

"And thy desire shall be thy Husband, and he shall rule over thee"—a sentence upon the Woman, a glorious promise to the Bride.

She still did not recognize him, but mistook him for a gardener. Then Jesus said, "Mary," and suddenly recognition flooded over her, and she exclaimed "Rabboni!"—a term of deep affection, respect and devotion—"My Master, Leader, Guide, Teacher!"

This was Jesus' first appearance after his resurrection. There must have been a reason why Mary Magdalene was chosen for this unique privilege—the first to see the risen Lord. Peter and John had been there but a few moments before. Jesus waited for them to go away before revealing himself alone to Mary.

She naturally, overwhelmed with joy and love, sought to touch him, but he said—

"Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to my Father."

Mary's privilege is further emphasized. She alone saw him in the state between grave and glorification. She was taken, as it were, into the intimate workshop of the Spirit.

He sent her to convey the joyful news to the disciples, and having performed this service, we never hear of Mary again.

* * *

The other women are still on their way to tell the disciples of the angels' message. Before they reach their destination, Jesus appears to them, too. This time he permits them to hold him by the feet. The ascending to the Father has now been accomplished.

We get a hint in these events of the rapidity of spiritual things, and their freedom from the bonds and bounds that constrain the natural man.

The second appearance, like the first, is to women. We hear so little of these loving, faithful women all through Jesus' ministry. Though they continued with him, and ministered to him, they are so much in the background that it is only with effort we can piece together the meagre record concerning them. But in the darkness and sorrows of death they come into brief and glorious prominence.

How beautifully God hath provided a vessel for every need!

Surely it is our wisdom to yield ourselves to the Master's use, fulfilling with loving, wholehearted devotion the task that comes to hand. Whether it be in prominence or obscurity, in public or in private, in honor or humility.

This was woman's greatest hour, when all his disciples forsook him and fled.

Our Old Man Is Crucified With Him

"We are buried with him by baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."

The predominant characteristic of this occasion is *joyfulness*. We are told that the awakening of a son of Adam to the love of God and the decision to become united to Christ is a cause of great joy in heaven. One more is added to the family of the sons of God, all knit together in the beauty of holiness.

While an occasion of great joy, it is also an occasion of great seriousness and solemnity. We are here to witness both a death and a birth. The whole background of baptism is *death*. The act of baptism is a recognition that the end of natural man is death—that all are subject to the power and lordship of the great enemy—that death casts an everpresent shadow over all life's hopes and joys—that the highest and noblest and sweetest of this life's activities all end in the darkness of the tomb.

But this is only part of the picture. This is the *natural* side. While baptism is a recognition of this state, and all the vanity and sorrow surrounding it, its principal purpose is to manifest the *great deliverance from it* that the love of God has, through Christ, provided. Baptism is a death whose purpose is to make way for a glorious new birth.

The chapter just read (Rom. 6) is a strong, intense exhortation to holiness, based on this death-and-new-birth symbolism.

Symbols are but shadows—it is the *reality they symbolize* that counts. The act of baptism itself is only a symbol—it is upon the fulfilment of the reality of the newness of life it portrays that life and death depend.

Paul shows that the reality symbolized is *death to the old natural way of the flesh and rebirth to the new way of the Spirit of holiness*. His conclusion in chapter 5 is this, that—

> *"As sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord"* (Rom. 5:21).

But *how* does grace "reign through righteousness unto eternal life?" Paul has said that—

> *"Where sin abounded, grace*—that is, the gentle unmerited goodness and kindness of the glorious love of God—*did much more abound"* (Rom. 5:20).

And also he has said that God had included all under sin, that He might have opportunity to extend His grace, mercy and kindness to all.

> *"What shall we say then?*—(he asks)—*Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?"* (Rom. 6:1).

Put in this blunt way, the thought seems self-evidently absurd, but actually *it is the unconscious presumption that lies behind any carelessness or complacency about any form or evidence of sin.*

Sin is a terrible, destroying disease—highly infectious—infinitely more deadly than any physical disease. When we are not straining every effort in the war against this evil thing, we are in practice saying, "Let us continue in sin so grace may abound."

> *"God forbid!—Let it not be!—How shall we, that are DEAD TO SIN, live any longer therein?"* (Rom. 6:2).

What does he mean: *"Dead to sin?"* How does a man become dead to sin?

> *"Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?"* (v. 3).

That is, do you not know that the act of baptism *is an act of recognition of the necessity of a DEATH*—a death in order to end a certain state of affairs—to create a complete severance and separation and termination (v. 4)—

> *"Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."*

We note the words, *"by the glory of the Father"*—"like as *Christ* was raised by the glory of the Father, even so we also . . ."

Ours, too, must be "by the glory of the Father"—there is *no other way*—no other possible way of walking "in newness of life." We cannot do it of our own weak, mortal, sinful selves. *"Newness of life by the glory of the Father"* is the great thought that gives baptism its beauty and significance. A new life, a completely new beginning. What a wonderful occasion it is!

A natural son of Adam, an earthy creature born under the shadow of death and bound by the dominion of sin, reaches a stage of development and enlightenment wherein he is drawn by the power of God to voluntarily choose that which is good, and holy, and divine, and reject all that is related to the

kingdom of sin and the wilfulness of the flesh—not from fear of consequences—not even just from desire for reward—but rather from pure, transforming love for a glorious divine Benefactor and Father—from an overwhelming sense of His infinite goodness and the transcendent joy of His friendship and love—

"Love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God."

"He that loveth not knoweth not God, for God is love."

"He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

"There is no fear in love: perfect love casteth out fear."

When we look at the beautiful picture John draws of divine love—of its holiness, and purity, and fearlessness, and perfection—we are apt, like Peter, to draw back into the thought—

"Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"

But the beloved apostle allays our fears, and gently draws us onward, teaching us that this beautiful picture is a matter of development and growth, though at first only dimly perceived—

"I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven";

"I write unto you, young men, because ye are strong";

"I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him from the beginning" (1 Jn. 2:12-13).

And he shows us the way—

"Whoso KEEPETH HIS WORD, in him verily is the love of God perfected; hereby know we that we are in Him" (1 Jn. 2:5)

Paul tells us (Rom. 10:17)—

"Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the WORD OF GOD."

That is the beginning. When hearing has brought faith, and faith—belief—has moved to thankful and humble obedience in the waters of baptism, then the joyful course of life and love reaches higher and higher toward the perfection of the divine ideal. This is expressed in many ways. Paul speaks of it as—

"Coming in the unity of the Faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13).

He speaks of it as being—

"Rooted and built up in him . . . unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding of the mystery of God

and of Christ, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:7, 2).

He speaks of it perhaps most beautifully and deeply in this way—

"We all, with open face reflecting as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. 3:18).

This is the glorious and exciting spiritual experience that leads upwards in ever-increasing joyfulness from the waters of baptism to the eternal radiance of the day of the Lord.

Baptism, while only the beginning, is the great turning-point in life. The act of baptism is unquestionably the greatest and most important single act and moment of one's entire lifetime.

"IF we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection."

It is clear that Paul is speaking, not just of the literal act of baptism which all professed believers pass through, but rather he is thinking of the full significance of being *"planted in the likeness of his death,"* for the parallel thought—"likeness of his resurrection"—does not just mean coming out of the grave, but the *resurrection of life* in its fullest and most glorious sense.

Resurrection as such—just the coming out of the grave—does not, we know, depend on baptism, but on *responsible knowledge of God.* Therefore the "likeness of Christ's resurrection" to which Paul refers cannot just mean emergence from the grave, for he makes it contingent upon a being "planted together in death."

And likewise this "planting together" cannot just be the external form of baptism for that is no assurance of sharing Christ's glorious resurrection—it must be the reality to which the act of baptism testifies and bears witness—the death of the "old man" and the "walking in newness of life." He continues—

"Knowing this, that our old man is (in baptism) *crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed"* (Rom. 6:6).

"Our old man is crucified with him." We are all double personalities—the old man of the flesh and the new man of the Spirit. Paul tells the Ephesians (4:22) that the old man is "corrupt—decaying—going to ruin—through deceitful lusts."

He calls them deceitful because *they never give the pleasure and happiness they seem to promise*—because they appear good and desirable to the blindness of the natural mind but actually only end in sorrow and regret and emptiness.

The "old man" is the natural man—pleasing ourselves—doing what we think *we* want to do—following the ordinary way of the world—everything that is contrary to the enlightened mind of the Spirit. We can most clearly see the distinction in contemplating the characteristics of the *new* man—the fruits of the Spirit, as Paul gives them in Gal. 5:22—

Love—that is, thinking, desiring and doing good to all, regardless of what *they* do to us.

Joy—a consistent spiritual cheerfulness flowing from close and satisfying fellowship with God.

Peace—calm, inward tranquility—"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee."—the mind resting at all times upon God.

Longsuffering—inexhaustible patience and kindness toward all human weakness and waywardness, recognizing the frailty and sadness of natural man.

Gentleness—no roughness, or hardness, or bitterness, or pride, or self-assertion—all of which are manifestations of ungodly ignorance.

Now Paul says that in baptism the old man is *crucified*—everything in the flesh contrary to these Spirit-fruits is crucified in the act of baptism.

Crucifixion has two aspects: a putting to death, and a public holding up to condemnation and repudiation.

The natural Serpent nature must be put to death, and in its putting to death it must be publicly held up to condemnation on the Rod of the Spirit-Word.

Baptism is a public repudiation of all these things as a way of life—a renouncing of allegiance to the old Master, Sin, whom we all serve from birth, and a pledging of allegiance to a new Master and a new way of life. It is a solemn covenant—

"All that the Lord hath said will we do."

Paul says (Rom. 6:18) that in baptism we are *"made free from sin."* What does it mean to be "made free from sin"? What does it mean in the *actual realities of life?*

It involves much. In the ultimate, if faithfully pursued until the end, it involves complete freedom from the sin-principle and its inseparable companion, death. This is the gracious, unreserved title of freedom and release that we are freely given in baptism—freedom from sin, from sorrow, from pain, disease and death—freedom from all the burdensome limitations of human frailty and corruption.

But primarily, at the present time, it means a great lifting of the burden of the consciousness of sin—of natural ugliness and deformity of character.

Paul exclaims, as he describes the awakening consciousness of the vicious evil that runs through every fiber of human nature—

> *"O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of death?"* (Rom. 7:24).

Baptism is the loving and merciful provision for cleansing from this condition—

> *"Ye are washed,"*
> *"Ye are sanctified"* (made holy),
> *"Ye are justified* (made righteous and upright)—*in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and BY THE SPIRIT OF OUR GOD"* (1 Cor. 6:11).

The baptized believer is one with Christ—a part of Christ—an accepted part of the triumphant perfection of holiness which in Christ trod sin under foot and held it powerless.

The baptized believer is a *Brother in Christ*—he has a guaranteed part in the final and eternal victory of sin and death—*as long as he truly abides in Christ.* Jesus said to his disciples, on the night before his death—

> *"Abide in me, and I in you. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit."*

—the glorious Spirit-fruits of holiness of character—

> *"These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full."*
> *"This is my COMMANDMENT—that ye LOVE ONE ANOTHER, EVEN AS I HAVE LOVED YOU"* (Jn. 15:11).

It is an essential requirement of discipleship that we, as brethren, love one another in the same way he loved us. Of that love which he has given us as a pattern, he says, as he continues—

> *"Greater love hath no man than this—that a man lay down his life for his friends"* (v. 13).

This is the love and fellowship to which baptism opens the door. And the new brother, as he rises from the cleansing waters, says with Paul (Gal. 2:20)—

> *"I am crucified with Christ. Nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life that I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me."*

The Same Care for One Another

The Real Purpose of a Fraternal Gathering

"The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee" (1 Cor. 12:21).

FIRST CORINTHIANS CHAPTER TWELVE

First, let us consider this word "purpose" itself. A purpose is an intelligent plan, methodically carried out to its fulfillment. Purpose involves futurity. The natural world has no futurity—just the brief present of a few troubled years.

There is only one thing that can be truly called a purpose, and that is God's eternal purpose to fill the earth with His glory.

God's declared purpose is to extend and expand His glory. Truly, at present all the universe is filled with His glory in the physical and material sense. His glory is everywhere. But it is an inanimate glory. His purpose is to extend His glory spiritually and morally—to extend it through *living creatures of glory,* the "Cherubim of Glory."

The Cherubim of Glory epitomize in symbol God's eternal purpose. They speak to us of God multitudinously manifested in life, activity, knowledge, intelligence, awareness, love, beauty, holiness. God's glory, as He revealed in answer to Moses' plea, "Show me Thy glory," is His character. He purposes to multiply in glorified creatures His goodness, His holiness, His beauty.

There is no purpose in the world of natural, dying mankind. The world—all that are in the world—have nothing that can be truly called a purpose. They have desires, hopes, ambitions, plans, diversions, amusements—but no purpose. Nothing that in a few short years ends in the grave can be truly said to be a purpose.

Only the children of God have a purpose. Their lives alone are purposeful. For them alone the future is bright, and light, and everlasting. All the rest of the world are animals—all outside the divine covenants of promise. Animals have no purpose, no sense of futurity. They live only for the present, for desire, lust, sensation, pleasure—and the end, eternal death.

What is the real purpose of a Fraternal Gathering?

Generally speaking, there is only one purpose to anything—the glory of God (Rev. 4:11)—

> *"Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are, and were created."*

"Pleasure" here is not really the right word. The Revised Version and Diaglott have—

"Because of Thy WILL."

This is the only place this word is translated "pleasure." Sixty times elsewhere it is translated "will," as in the passages—

"Thy will be done on earth."

"Not my will, but Thine."

All things are created for God's will or purpose, and they have no other purpose than to fulfill that will.

There is only one purpose, but there are different *aspects* of that purpose. We do different things to forward or accomplish different details of that purpose. *ALL* our lives—every activity—is, or should be, devoted to the one and only purpose, the glory of God. So we may say the purpose of a fraternal gathering is the glory of God, and it is well to keep this realization prominently before us.

But a Fraternal Gathering is a special and specific arrangement. What then is its special purpose, within the general framework of the overall purpose of the glory of God?

I believe the hymns we have sung, and the chapter read, express that purpose—

"As the (natural) *body is one, and hath many members . . . so also is Christ."*

Jesus says the second greatest commandment, after the love of God, is—

"Thou shalt love thy neighbor AS THYSELF."

The force of the command lies in the "as thyself"—to the same extent; in the same way. Everyone naturally loves themselves. But they have to learn, they have to be taught, to continually expand the sphere of their sympathy and concern and affection.

Natural man is self-centered. *This is death.* Spiritual man sees himself as a small part of an immense divine, purposeful, interworking unity. *This is life.*

God's purpose with us is to expand our consciousness from the narrowness of self to the universality of the spirit. In God's wise providence, for the accomplishing of this purpose in us, the Ecclesia is the unit of operation and manifestation: the Body is One—

"Ye are all One in Christ."

"That they may be One, as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be One in us."

"The glory which Thou gavest me I have given them . . . that they may be perfect in One."

To deepen our consciousness and fulfillment of this "Perfect in One" concept is the real purpose of a Fraternal Gathering.

The meaning of "Ecclesia" has different degrees of extension. In its narrowest sense, it is the local group with which, and within which, we—in God's wise provision and providence—are working out our salvation.

In a wider, but still present, sense it is the Body of Christ in its current, living constitution—those with whom we are contemporary throughout the world.

In its fullest, most universal sense, the Ecclesia comprises all the Redeemed of all generations—the multitude of glory that no man can number.

From week to week we work and associate within the framework of our own local ecclesia (to some extent extending to neighboring ecclesias), but we must always be vividly conscious of the larger aspect of the Ecclesia of Christ diffused through both past history and present geography.

Paul is our example. He could sincerely and literally write to all throughout the ecclesial world (Eph. 1:16)—

"I cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers."

"Without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers" (Rom. 1:9).

A Fraternal Gathering is to strengthen by personal contact the ecclesial bonds of unity and sympathy and fellowship and understanding.

Paul prayed fervently to be able to see the ecclesia at Rome, that, as he says—

"I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith of both you and me."

In God's wisdom for our good, the Ecclesia is the unit, not the individual. No man liveth to himself: that is selfishness, stagnation, sterility. The Body is ONE, and hath many members.

The heart of our gradual education from ugly natural ignorance to the living beauty of the Truth is to learn to think and to act unselfishly as part of the Body, and not selfishly as a separate individual, even as regards our own salvation.

The flesh is for itself. Even its goodnesses to others are for its own satisfaction. It is impossible to escape this vicious circle of self-centeredness except by breaking completely out

of the flesh into the mind of the Spirit, by constant prayer and study of the Word, and the help of God.

We must die completely to ourselves, and be born anew into the Body of Christ.

It is God's wise and loving appointment that we develop beauty and spirituality of character by communion with and care for one another. We remember the original Ecclesia in the fresh, unspoiled glory of its first pure enthusiasm—

"The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and one soul."

"Neither said any of them that aught of the things he possessed was his own, but they had ALL THINGS COMMON" (Acts 4:32).

The word translated "common" is usually rendered "fellowship"—

"They had all things IN FELLOWSHIP."

This alone is true, pure, spiritual fellowship—true unity of heart—true living.

Of course, this beautiful picture could not last. It was but a brief glimpse of what man could rise to by the original, unspoiled fire of pure zeal for God; but human nature is too evil, too selfish, too fleshly, too small, too self-centered, for such perfection of heart—such Oneness—to last.

The primitive spiritual glory of the newborn Ecclesia soon faded away, as the flesh flooded back in, but the vision remains as the guide and inspiration of those few in each generation that truly seek the perfection of God—

"They had all things in fellowship . . ."

"The Body is One, and hath many members."

What is the real purpose of a Fraternal Gathering?

* * *

In this 12th chapter of 1st Corinthians, Paul is speaking of spiritual gifts. There is no possession or open manifestation of the Spirit today, but the principle remains—

Each member of the Body is given his proper gift—ability—capability for good, for dedicated, lifelong use for the glory of God and welfare of the Body—*AND FOR NO OTHER PURPOSE.*

The Truth is not a spare-time hobby; it is a full-time job—and only those who realize this have any hope of making it to the Kingdom of God. Paul instructs Timothy—

"Having food and raiment, be therewith content."

To give this command its full force and meaning, and to lift it from the counsel of mere indolent hoboism, we must tie it in

with his command to the Corinthians a little later in this epistle—

"Be ALWAYS ABOUNDING in the work of the Lord."

"Always abounding." This is the practical and constructive reason why we must, "having food and raiment"—the bare necessities—"be content": stop, and get on with eternal things, the work of the Lord; the feeding and clothing of the Body of Christ.

To the extent, beyond provision of food and raiment, that we get bogged down in the rubbish of the world that is so soon to pass away—time-and money-and effort-devouring possessions and positions—to that extent we are neglecting the Body, we are hurting the Body, we are robbing the Body of Christ.

"Always abounding in the work of the Lord."

How CAN we, if the world is hanging heavy around our neck?

"The cares of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lust of other things, choke the Word, that it bringeth forth no fruit."

Clearly, in Corinth, there was unhealthy competition about spiritual gifts. This was falling right back into the selfishness and pride of the flesh, on a higher, more hypocritical, more responsible level.

The gifts were not for present gratification and glorification, but for the selfless service of the Body. From the apparently most exalted to the apparently most menial, all were for the same purpose and all were equally needed.

"The Body is One, and hath many members."

When the disciples, at the last supper, bickered over who should be the greatest, Christ washed their feet. It was a menial task. It took no ability. Anyone could do it. Yet it was a manifestation of the highest degree of spirituality and divine perception.

It was a lesson for all time—not so much of humility (which is simply but the inevitable by-product of wisdom) as of perception, discernment, understanding, unity, and love.

What is the real purpose of a Fraternal Gathering?

* * *

There are many lessons in this 1st Corinthians 12, as Paul draws the parallel between the human body and the Ecclesia of God. And overshadowing all that he says is the climax we know he is leading to in chapter 13—

"Yet show I unto you a more excellent way."

"By One Spirit are we all baptized into One Body,

whether Jew, Gentile, bond or free: and have all been made to drink into One Spirit" (v. 13).

This was the great turning-point in our life; our passing from death to life—from the selfish, ignorant slavery of the flesh to the selfless freedom of the Spirit. John says—

"We know we have passed from death to life because we love the brethren" (1 Jn. 3:14).

He is saying the same thing as Paul is here: we have made the transition from fleshly individuality to spiritual community. We have ceased to be ourselves to seek our own desires, to consider our own interests—and we have become absorbed wholly and wholeheartedly into the glory and fellowship and unity and joyful, satisfying service of the Body of Christ—

"We KNOW we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren."

* * *

"For the body is not one member, but many" (v. 14).

The beauty and usefulness and purpose of the human body is in its diversity. A severed foot or hand is a repulsive monstrosity. It is obviously dead and useless—detached, broken off, lost, cast aside, rejected; yea, worse: decaying, corrupting, putrefying.

But a complete, living, healthy body, with all its parts functioning smoothly together, all perfectly coordinated in grace and symmetry and harmony of movement and purpose, all instantly subject to the one Head—is of great attractiveness, and obvious power and usefulness.

No single member can be a body in itself: however accomplished, however skilled, however wise. No one of us can stand alone.

We may, by unavoidable force of circumstances, be confined to lonely isolation, like Paul shut up in prison, but we are still part of the Body; and we must, like Paul, think and live and move and breathe as part of the Body. Those who live for themselves alone, however holily they may strive to live, are monstrosities and abortions. Paul said—

"Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is offended, and I burn not?"

And of Jesus it is recorded—

"Surely he hath borne our grief and carried our sorrows."

"A man of sorrows"—not his own, but the sorrows of all the world—

"Remember them that are bound, as bound with them."

"Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep."

"Could ye not watch with me one hour?"

* * *

"If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body—is it therefore not of the body? If the ear shall say, because I am not the eye . . ."

We may be a foot, or a hand, or an eye, or an ear. It is immaterial which we are. It is up to God what He makes us to suit His purpose. He makes us in each case what is needed for the Body in our time and place and circumstance.

The important thing is—we ARE part of the Body; a necessary part. The Body cannot function without us, nor can we function without the Body.

We must live—not for ourselves—but for the Body. We must each do, to the fullest extent of our opportunity and ability, what comes to our hand for the welfare and usefulness of the Body.

Unless every member, from least to greatest, is consciously doing this—stripping off all the rubbish of the world in order to free themselves to do this—then the Body cannot function as the true, spiritual Body of Christ.

* * *

"If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing?"

The beauty and usefulness of the body lies in its diversified unity—the marvelous and harmonious specialization of its infinite multitude of parts and functions—the eye to see, the ear to hear, the foot to walk, the hand to do . . .

Even in the simplest actions of the body, there is an exquisite coordination of many parts, perfected by long use and practice.

So it must be with the Body of Christ. All parts MUST, by use and association and self-submergence to the common purpose, develop a close coordination in the work of the Lord.

* * *

"God hath set the members every one in the body as it hath pleased HIM" (v. 18).

Here again, for "pleased," we have the same word. Literally: "As He hath willed"—that is, according to HIS purpose.

It is a comfort, and a responsibility, to know that it is God Who has put us *where* we are, and has made us *what* we are,

according to His Own eternal will and purpose. It is a comfort to know we are part of a purpose; that we have in God's sight a useful function for the present, and a glorious prospect for the future.

Most of the world's silly pleasures and indulgences are a running away from cold reality, because they cannot squarely face the inevitable tragedy of the hopeless darkness and futility of the future that confronts them all. Life without God is life without purpose—an empty, crushing, meaningless tragedy of struggle and sorrow.

But all the members of the Body of Christ are appointed by God to a joyful, useful, satisfying work, and a glorious destiny of life and hope—IF they "lose their life"—submerge their separate individuality—into the unity and service of the Body.

* * *

"The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee."

This is another deep lesson we must learn if we are to be a part of the Body of Christ. In the wisdom of God, it is ordained that we all need each other. We may, in our self-sufficient blindness, not realize the need; or in our fleshly pride, refuse to recognize it.

This is indeed sad. It was the condition of the Laodiceans, who had no conception of their true spiritual condition or needs.

We may not be able, in our natural ignorance, to at first realize this need of others, but it is wisdom to take God's word for it, until we grow spiritually into the capacity of realization. Only as living and integral parts of the Body can we be pleasing to Him.

* * *

"Much more those members of the body which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: and those members which we think to be less honorable, on them we bestow more abundant honor."

In the natural body, some parts seem weak and feeble and delicate, some parts seem less attractive and honorable, some parts seem to have no useful function.

We all know how the doctors of the world, in the ignorance of evolutionary self-delusion, from time to time develop a morbid fad for cutting out some part of the body because they do not know its purpose. But God knows why each part is there, and what it is for.

Truly, there are times when parts of the body become diseased and corrupt, and have to be removed lest they infect and destroy the body. This is sad, and there is a sad spiritual parallel for this too, and the Body suffers, and is never really the same again.

In our natural body, we cherish and protect our weaker parts; we honor and clothe our uncomely parts. Paul said—

"In lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves."

And in this connection he reminds us—

"Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before unto judgment, and some men they follow after."

"Likewise also the good works of some are manifest beforehand, and they that are otherwise cannot be hid."

All are sinners, and hidden sins of the spirit are worse before God than open sins of the flesh. Bad temper and impatience may be worse in God's sight than bad morals and impurity.

* * *

"For our comely parts have no need, but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honor to that part which lacked" (v. 24).

We are told by Christ that the first shall be last, and the last first. God does not see as man seeth, for God looks upon the heart. We are told—

"Where much is given, much is required"

—and only God knows what is given, and what is therefrom expected. A striving, one-talent member may, unnoticed and unseen, be doing far more for the glory of God than the showy external accomplishments that come so easily and enjoyably to a five-talent member. The main arena of our labor and our testing is the battle within ourselves, the battle with the flesh.

And many who, in his Name, have prophesied, and cast out devils, and done many wonderful works, have never won, or even faced, the great inner struggle. And to them, in spite of their long catalog of achievement, he will say: "I never knew you."

"That the members should have the same care for one another: that there be no schism."

This is important. We are naturally drawn to some more than to others, usually for natural or fleshly reasons.

But even if it be for the purest of spiritual reasons, it is dangerous, and must be controlled. There *must* be the "same care" for ALL. The Body is One, and anything, official or

unofficial, selfishly thoughtless or intensely well-meaning, that subdivides that Oneness is hurtful to the Body.

We naturally tend to polarize—by natural affinity, by common interest, by age, etc. But this fleshly tendency must be rooted out. There must be the *same care*, the same interest, the same affinity, for all.

And we shall find, in the loving wisdom of God, as we so often marvelously find in submission to His provisions, that this gives a far richer and deeper communion than polarization into groups of common characteristics.

The young have much to learn from the old, and the old from the young. Unity in diversity is the beauty of the Body. The Body is One. In this aspect, too, the same principle applies—

"The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee."

* * *

"And whether one member suffer, all members suffer with it."

In the natural body this is obviously true. Pain or disease anywhere affects the entire being, and the comfort and activity of every part.

It is not quite so obvious in the spiritual Body, but it is even more true, whether the suffering be misfortune or misconduct. This is the beauty and glory of ecclesial unity.

Sorrow and suffering are not purposeless. Our present lot is not meant to be for mere enjoyment, but a brief period of intense training, development, and preparation for eternal, endless joy—

"Our LIGHT affliction . . ."

—says Paul, the lifelong sufferer—

". . . worketh an exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

Individual tribulation worketh patience, and shared tribulation does more—it worketh deeper fellowship and unity—

"God comforteth us in all our tribulation . . ."

—he says at the beginning of 2nd Corinthians—

". . . that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God."

"Or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it."

Truly, salvation is in one sense an individual thing. We each at last stand or fall individually before the Judge.

But in another very real and perhaps much deeper sense, it is *not* an individual thing, for no one who seeks to save *himself* will save himself. Only those who have clearly seen themselves—and *made* themselves—harmonious, sympathetic, interwoven, joy-and-sorrow sharing parts of the Body of Christ, will be accepted as parts of that Body.

The flesh looks out for number one, even in matters of salvation, and our unconscious contamination with Western civilization's exaggerated cult of the independence of the individual, deepens this tendency within us.

But the only way to salvation is through complete submission and submersion of self into the Body of Christ—ignoring, forgetting, neglecting, repudiating self in the service of the whole.

It is no accident or coincidence or meaningless rhetoric that we find both Moses and Paul expressing the wish, if possible, of being blotted out from God's purpose for the salvation of their blind and erring kinsmen after the flesh, and we need not be reminded of Christ himself in this connection—

> *"Wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities."*

Without this characteristic, they would not have been suitable for God's purpose.

What is the real purpose of a Fraternal Gathering?

It is to manifest our unity; to strengthen, deepen, intensify our communion; to nourish and develop our mutual interest and sympathy and compassion; to beautify, purify, sanctify our fellowship together as the One Body of Christ—all members consciously, and actively, and joyfully, parts of a coordinated unity, knit together in love.

We do not, cannot, stand alone. We are each but a small part of a great and glorious whole, and only as such can we lay hold on the love of God and the joy of the Spirit. This is the will and wisdom of God.

Of ourselves alone we are incomplete, useless, purposeless, monstrous—like a severed limb or a separated organ.

Let us then lay hold thankfully and eagerly upon this opportunity to draw more closely together in the unity of the Spirit that—each forgetting himself in devotion to the whole—we may unitedly, joyfully and approvedly stand before God as the true and glorious Body of Christ.

In Labors More Abundant

"Through infirmity of the flesh I preached the Gospel to you . . . and my temptation which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected" (Gal. 4:13-14).

SECOND CORINTHIANS CHAPTERS ELEVEN AND TWELVE

In Paul's two epistles to the ecclesia at Corinth is revealed more intensely than anywhere else the great burden that he constantly bore—

"The care of all the ecclesias" (2 Cor. 11:28).

Paul's conflict in Corinth which caused these epistles to be written was largely similar to the conflict in Galatia which caused the Galatian epistle. In both cases it was false teachers who perverted the Gospel and belittled the apostle.

But the conflict in Corinth was much more personal, severe, and intense. To the influence of false teachers was added the great pressure of the corruption of the city of Corinth, and the brethren and sisters' own backgrounds as drawn from it.

Corinth was proverbially the vice capital of the Roman Empire. To "Corinthianize" was a word commonly used for lewdness and licentiousness. It was the central seaport and crossroads of the Empire. It was a hub of wealth and activity—the center of Greek commerce, industry, and finance. The population was about three-quarters of a million, the majority slaves.

Paul went to Corinth on his second missionary journey, after his disappointing confrontation with the self-satisfied, sterile philosophers of educated and cultured Athens.

Paul says he was in Corinth *"in fear and trembling,"* but Christ appeared to him and told him not to be afraid but to speak out, for he had "much people in that city." Paul stayed there eighteen months, and built up an ecclesia. This was around 50 to 52 AD.

It was about five years later that the two epistles were written, a few months apart—the first probably in the winter or early spring of 56 AD, and the second in summer or fall, same year.

The first was written from Ephesus, near the end of Paul's three-year stay there during his third missionary journey.

Conditions were bad in Corinth. There were divisions, serious moral corruptions, major doctrinal errors. The faithful among them were deeply concerned, but appeared to be a small minority.

Paul made it plain that there had to be correction or disfellowship (1 Cor. 4:21; 5:5, 9, 13; 2 Cor. 13:2).

We have two epistles and a record of two visits to Corinth by Paul—the founding visit and a visit fairly soon after the second epistle. There may have been two other letters, one certainly before the two we have (1 Cor. 5:9), and one possibly between them (2 Cor. 2:4; 7:8), and possibly one other visit, between the two recorded (2 Cor. 2:1; 13:2).

It is clear from the first epistle that the two main problems were a glorification of worldly wisdom, and moral corruption. Corinth as a city was proud, clever, self-satisfied, rich in this world's goods, and utterly corrupt.

Herein we have a close parallel with our own day and problems, for these same two things are increasingly the main destructive influence pressing upon the Truth—worldly wisdom and moral looseness.

The second epistle was written after Paul had received word through Titus that the Corinthians had finally responded to Paul's exhortations and entreaties with an intense reaction of sorrow, affection, self-purification. He expresses it in chapter 7—

> *"Your earnest desire, your mourning, your fervent mind toward me"* (v. 7).
>
> *"Ye sorrowed after a godly sort. What carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge!"* (v. 11)

People are strange creatures—ourselves included. Enlightened believers are a combination of two powerful forces: the ugliness of the flesh from beneath, and the beauty of the Spirit from above. We can swing from one extreme to another, according to which is in the ascendancy.

Paul was able, by warning, entreaty, and loving persuasion, to bring the mind of the Spirit back on top in Corinth.

It is a matter of what our mind is focused on—what it is tuned in to—what it is giving heed to: the natural motions of the flesh within, or the facts, truths, promises, instructions, evidences in the Word—

> *"Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God"* (Rom. 10:17)

—and faith (trust, assurance, conviction) is the power-link between the mind of God and the well-springs of conduct and action within us.

In the last part of the epistle (chapters 10-13), now that the ecclesia as a whole is restored to the path of Truth and of allegiance to the apostle, he turns his attention to, and openly takes note of, those who had maliciously attempted to belittle and undermine him and turn the ecclesia against him.

He demonstrates his own divine authority, answers their slanders concerning him, and calls attention to the evidence of his long, faithful, consistent labors and sufferings for the ecclesias.

Paul's motive is not self-justification. He does not hesitate to call himself the *"least of the apostles"* and the *"chief of sinners"* because he persecuted the Ecclesia of Christ (1 Cor. 15:9; 1 Tim. 1:15).

His concern is for the stability and welfare of the Corinthian ecclesia. For the Truth's sake in Corinth, he *must* establish his divinely-appointed authority, and he *must* expose the falseness of those who are endeavoring to undermine that authority and turn the ecclesias against him.

There is guidance for us in every detail of this record, and without this guidance clearly in our minds, we are lost.

Every time we—however well-meaningly—allow ourselves to be guided by natural thinking in dealing with problems, we shall get off the true, God-pleasing track. We shall be either too harsh, or too lenient—both are very harmful.

There is only one safeguard: the Word of God. *Generally,* we must by consistent study fill our minds with a deep background of the instructions and examples of the Scriptures.

And *specifically,* in each particular instance and decision, consciously and prayerfully, each step of the way, seek a direct guide from Scripture as applying to each circumstance we face.

It is clear from what Paul writes, and from the whole history of the early ecclesias as we find it in the New Testament, that false apostles, false teachers, were a constant peril, and that—indeed—as soon as the apostles were gone, they corrupted and carried away the whole Body, except a remnant.

The Corinthians were for the moment purged, and reestablished on a sound foundation, and reunited to Paul, but their continued stability was by no means assured. The flesh, though temporarily dethroned and restrained, is never dead. They had to be regrounded with strong evidence they would remember.

He is, therefore, in chapters 10 to 13, driven to an appearance of self-justification and self-glorification, in his seeking to impress them with the true state of affairs.

It was with great reluctance and embarrassment that Paul writes so intimately of himself, but in God's wisdom and providence, it was good for the Corinthians and for all succeeding generations that the circumstances should require this intimate self-manifestation that Paul gives us in these chapters.

In chapter 11 of this second epistle we have that wonderful, but terrible, outline of Paul's sufferings for the sake of the Truth. We should read it frequently and thoughtfully.

It is surely one of the most powerful antidotes to self-complacency, self-glorification and self-pity in all the Bible.

Who can read this without feeling utterly useless, and abased, and ashamed of the slightest manifestation of self-satisfaction or self-pity?

"Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more—

"In labors more abundant . . ." (v. 23).

Constant, lifelong, day-and-night complete dedication to the Truth's work.

"In stripes above measure . . ."

Beaten more often than he could keep count of.

"In prisons more frequent . . ."

Few of us have even ONCE been imprisoned for the Truth.

"In deaths oft . . ."

Always in peril of death.

Often he was on the verge of death. (The beatings he had were often enough to kill).

Once at least that we know of he was stoned and his body dragged out of the city, supposing he was dead (Acts 14:19).

"Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one . . ." (v. 24).

Forty was all the Law allowed (Deut. 25:3). They gave him one stripe less each time, out of perverted carefulness lest they break the Law! What blind hypocrisy!

"Thrice beaten with rods . . ." (v. 25).

Roman punishment. These he could possibly have avoided by pleading his freeborn citizenship, but it may then have meant greater hardships for others with him. This may have been why he submitted to it at Philippi (Acts 16:22).

"Once was I stoned . . ."

That was at Lystra, just a short time after they had tried to worship him as a god for healing the sick. How brief and undependable is human gratitude!

"Thrice I suffered shipwreck; a night and a day have I been in the deep . . ."

We have no record of these three shipwrecks (Melita was later). It makes us realize how small a part of Paul's labors and trials we know of, and yet the little we do know is infinitely more than any of us ever experience.

"In journeyings often . . ."

Mostly on foot—hundreds and hundreds of miles—often in pain through abuse or sickness; often in hardship; always in danger.

"In perils of waters . . ."

The original is "rivers"; he would often have to find a way across floods and torrents.

"In perils of robbers . . ."

Travel from city to city was slow and hazardous. Robbers abounded who left their victims beaten and helpless.

"In perils by mine own countrymen . . ."

They continually plotted to kill him. He had to constantly be on guard; often had to change his plans (Acts 20:3).

"In perils by the heathen . . ."

"In perils in the city . . ."

"In perils in the wilderness . . ."

Wild beasts and wilder men.

Consider the hardships of travel in those days—the problems of eating, and washing, and protection from the rain and cold. It wasn't always balmy weather and shining sun.

We are appalled even by the hardships brother Roberts encountered in his travels less than one hundred years ago—hard, springless carts on hilly, rutty, rocky trails, where relaxation or comfort was out of the question, and even staying in the cart a constant struggle.

And brother Thomas' many and long journeyings for the Truth were similarly rigorous and uncomfortable.

"In perils in the sea . . ."

"In perils among false brethren . . ."

Surely saddest and worst of all!

"Weariness and painfulness . . ."

He was under the constant pressure of time and labor. He worked night and day to support not only himself but others, too, besides all the labor for the Truth. Tent-making was a menial task: long hours, little pay.

"In watchings often . . ."

What were these "watchings?" Literally it means "sleeplessness," which would be from many causes and circumstances in his incessant travels and labors. It is a great burden to have to carry on intense mental and physical activity without sufficient sleep, and this would be Paul's usual experience.

"In hunger and thirst . . ."

We do not even KNOW what real hunger and thirst are, but they were Paul's frequent companions. Our idea of thirst is when we play too hard in the sun, and just can't wait till we go across the street to buy a cold drink. And "hunger" just means going an hour or two past dinner.

"In fastings often . . ."

Here is *voluntary* abstention from food. Why? Because of the intensity of his zeal for God and concern for man. Fasting is the natural reaction of great spiritual absorption and devotion. Working and ministering and teaching would often take precedence over care for self.

"In cold and nakedness . . ."

We take comfort so much for granted that the slightest discomfort of cold or heat is seized upon as a justification for cancelling or postponing the work of the Truth. We just *couldn't* have a meeting if the room was above or below a certain temperature!

Let us remember Paul.

And in considering all these sufferings and hardships and humiliations of Paul, consider the type of man he was when we first meet him: consider his ambitions, his education, his preeminent position in his own nation, and his dazzling prospects of ever-increasing power and prestige.

He had every possible advantage that a proud and ambitious Jew could desire (and freeborn Roman citizenship on top of all that).

How the Pharisees to whom he belonged loved the preeminence, and the fawning of the awed and worshipful multitude of the common people, and to be called, "Rabbi, Rabbi!"

But Paul gave all this up—yea, considered it all but dung—DUNG—that he might win Christ and be found of him.

> *"Besides those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily—the care of all the ecclesias:*
>
> *"Who is weak—and I am not weak? Who is offended—and I burn not"* (vs. 28-29)?

To what extent do we enter into the spirit of Paul—the spirit of constant, intimate concern for, and identification with, the problems and burdens of the least and the remotest of Christ's brethren and sisters?

"If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities" (11:30).

* * *

This is what he goes into in chapter 12, where he reveals two of the most striking and marvelous aspects of his personal experiences in the Truth: his visions, and his *"thorn in the flesh"*—which are intimately related together as—

"The things which concern mine infirmities."

The "thorn in the flesh," which was an object of scorn and ridicule and disgust to Paul's enemies, really was the very opposite of what they took it to be, for it was actually the result and evidence of Christ's special favor toward him. It was given him because of his special and unique exaltation in God's use and purpose, to protect him from the temptations of pride—

"I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago" (v. 2).

He is, of course, speaking of himself. His form of words indicate that he is not speaking as an independent person, or of personal accomplishments, but as a chosen instrument of Christ. When he wrote this, it was fourteen years since the beginning of his ministry in the ecclesias, when Barnabas brought him from Tarsus to Antioch. The vision to which he refers was before that.

"Whether in the body, or whether out of the body, I cannot tell."

Paul did not know what form the vision took, or how it was presented to him—whether he saw with his eyes or just with his understanding. It was not important. God's ways of operation are beyond our capacity of comprehending.

"Caught up to the third heaven."

Peter clearly tells us what the third heaven is. Speaking of the great world dispensations, separated by the universal judgments of God, he refers to the—

"Heavens and earth of old" (2 Pet. 3:5)

—before the Flood—perishing in an overflowing of water: the *first* heavens. Then (2 Pet. 3:7)—

"The heaven and earth which are now, reserved unto fire of the day of judgment"

—the *second* heavens. And finally the—

"New Heaven and New Earth wherein dwelleth righteousness" (2 Pet. 3:13),

—for which we look: the *third* heaven—the Millennium and Beyond.

Especially the Beyond, as far as the visions of Paul are concerned. The Millennium itself is but the brief stepping-stone to the eternal order of things wherein God will be "all in all."

These visions Paul was not permitted to discuss with anyone—not even his closest and most intimate associates in the work. They were for him alone, of all mankind. What a burden of glory and responsibility for a mortal man to bear!

"How that he was caught up into Paradise, and heard unspeakable words which it is not lawful for a man to utter" (v. 4).

Paul clearly here speaks of Paradise interchangeably with the third heaven, and we find this confirmed both in Jesus' words to the thief on the cross, and also in the reference to *"Paradise"* in Revelation 2, compared to the "New Heaven" of chapters 21 and 22.

"And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure" (v. 7).

What was Paul's *"thorn in the flesh"?* It is impossible to say. There are many theories. We can, however, determine certain things about it, from this passage and others. The two most widely held theories as to what it was are epilepsy and ophthalmia—a painful, handicapping, offensive-appearing eye disease.

It is to the Galatians and Corinthians, the two places where his authority is challenged and his person derided, that he speaks of this affliction. What we do know about it is that it was first of all humiliating and humbling—this present passage says that was its divine purpose.

It was a burden and a handicap in the work of the Truth. He speaks of it as a "thorn"—or more properly a "stake in the flesh." He speaks of it as a "temptation" and an "infirmity"—that is a trial and a weakness.

The big lesson is that Paul had to be handicapped, humbled, mortified, humiliated, for his own safety and good. Pride is the great danger. We can all see it so clearly in all its silliness in everyone else.

All are constantly on guard to justify themselves, to wriggle out of embarrassing mistakes, to cover up humiliating evi-

dence of ignorance or wrong judgment, to relate little self-glorifying experiences illustrating how clever they are and how foolish others are in comparison. Most arguments are just two prides making a foolish spectacle of themselves.

It is hard to see all this in ourselves, though strangely everyone else seems to have it.

Perhaps Paul's most enlightening reference to his affliction is what he says to the Galatians who, like the Corinthians, had once shown him great affection as the bearer of the Gospel of life to them, and then had despised him at the instigation of his enemies. In Galatians 4:13-15 he says—

> *"Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the Gospel unto you at the first: and my temptation which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected."*

The word for *"rejected"* literally means to *"spit out,"* and is used about things that are repulsive and disgusting.

This gives us more light on the nature of Paul's humiliating affliction. In their earlier thankful affection for him they had not despised him nor been repelled by the offensive-appearing nature of his infirmity. He continues (v. 15)—

> *"Where is then the blessedness ye spoke of?"*
> *"For I bear you record that if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes and have given them to me."*

It is principally this statement that has convinced many that Paul's "thorn" was an affliction of his sight by a disease which gave him repulsive appearance. This, as a counter-balance to his visions, is considered all the more fitting as a reminder, for it was his eyes that were affected by his first vision of Christ on the road to Damascus.

But it is not conclusive and it is better not to speculate. What he says concerning the Galatians giving him their very eyes, if possible, is not an unusual way of expressing extreme affection, and may have no direct reference to the nature of his affliction.

We *do* know it was a great burden, humiliation, and handicap. Beyond this we cannot go.

> *"For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me"* (v. 8).

He apparently knew its purpose, but still he found it such a grievous burden that three times he implored that it be removed. The first two times he appears to have been refused, without being given an explanation, but on the third occasion

he was given an answer by Christ that was all-sufficient for him.

The affliction was given, he says at first, *"lest he be exalted"* by his special privileges, and position in God's purpose. This is negative—to prevent something undesirable happening, and Paul would feel it had served its purpose and he was doubtless confident—perhaps rightly so—that the danger of that had passed.

But Jesus' final answer gives the positive, constructive side; and Paul understood, and was content—

> *"My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness"* (v. 9).

One of the greatest dangers the Truth of God faces in every age is when it attracts clever, capable, self-confident people who take it over and drive it forward to a self-destructive success, like Laodicea—outwardly rich, and successful, and increased with goods, and in need of nothing.

* * *

"MY strength is made perfect in WEAKNESS."

Paul strongly emphasizes this vital truth at the beginning of the first epistle—

> *"Ye see your calling, brethren—not the wise, the mighty, the noble; but God hath chosen the weak things of the world, the base things, and things which are despised, and things which are not—which are nothing —to bring to nought things that are"* (1 Cor. 1:26-28).

As soon as the Truth starts to get socially respectable in the world, as soon as it begins to attract the "intellectuals," it is on its way out, and a complete new beginning has to be made if anything is to endure.

The painful, distressing, humiliating thorn in the flesh was not just a negative leash to keep Paul from going wrong. Rather, in the love and wisdom of God, it was a positive force to make him a more fitting, suitable, and useful vessel for the grace poured upon him and the work set before him.

God's ways are not man's ways. They are usually the very OPPOSITE of man's ways. To the eyes of man's wisdom they are incomprehensible foolishness. The mind of the flesh cannot understand them.

Do we have the mind of the flesh, or the mind of the Spirit?

Do we think naturally and animally according to "common sense," as all the world does, or do we perceive the utter falseness of all natural thoughts? Paul says (1 Cor. 2:15-16)—

"He that is spiritual discerneth all things . . . we have the mind of Christ."

After the third entreaty for relief from the thorn, Paul understood and was content.

It was not just a matter of resigning himself to the inevitable, and patiently accepting something he could not help. That is not enough. That will never do. That won't accomplish anything.

That again is just negative. That's no glory to God. If it is glory to anyone, it is glory to the one who suffers meaninglessly in patience. Paul goes much further (v. 10)—

"Therefore I TAKE PLEASURE—I rejoice—in infirmities, in contempt, in hardship, in persecution, in distress for Christ's sake, for when I am weak then am I strong."

When I am most helpless physically, socially, financially—most helpless from every natural, worldly point of view—*then* am I closest to the infinite strength and power and might and care of Christ who strengtheneth me.

We can see—and Paul could see—that his thorn in the flesh was not just an external added burden to counteract the effect of his visions and revelations.

Rather it was an integral, essential part of the whole pattern of Christ's infinite grace upon him. It was part of the special, unique revelation that was personally given to him of the marvelous working of the wisdom of God.

What is the lesson for us? We are not Paul. The more we learn and realize and meditate upon concerning this man, the more we realize our utter comparative uselessness and insignificance and unprofitableness.

Here was a man who, second only to Christ himself, was completely enrapt and enveloped in the purpose of God—who stood at its very heart and vortex.

But the lesson IS for us. In our little, secondary, inconsequential way, the lesson is for us.

It means a complete reversal of all mental values, so as to be able to truly, sincerely find peace and rejoicing in tribulation and deprivation: a complete change of life-interest, of life-treasure, of life-meaning.

Everything that seems important to the natural mind must become completely unimportant. Everything that seems unimportant to the natural mind must become infinitely important. All the meaningless little round of daily care—what shall

we eat, what shall we drink, wherewithal shall we be clothed, where shall we live—must become utterly unimportant to us, if we are to learn the lesson of life.

These things truly must be taken care of in an orderly way, as quickly and simply as possible, but *they CANNOT become objects of interest or absorption or continual conversation.* The mind must be filled with better things.

> *"I will glory in mine infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me—for when I am weak then am I strong!"* (vs. 9-10)

Paul's whole life and joy and interest and treasure was CHRIST IN HIM, the hope of glory. Whatever was related to that was important to Paul; and nothing else was. To him this was the great reality and pleasure and satisfaction of life, and the more everything else was taken away from him, the greater this enjoyment became. He said, simply and all-inclusively—

> *"To me, to live is Christ."*

And so it must come to be with us, if we are to live at all, in any true, and spiritual, and joyful sense.

The love of Christ was Paul's greatest possession—the fellowship of Christ his greatest pleasure. We need not pity Paul for the burden of his suffering, nor commiserate him for the loss of all the rubbish the stupid world holds dear.

Rather we should envy him for the unassailable joy of his single-minded devotion, and emulate him in his casting aside of all things that he might win Christ.

He told the Corinthians earlier in this second letter that he was sorrowful, yet always rejoicing: that he had nothing, yet possessed all things. Paul is so intensely absorbed in the infinite grace and glory of his divine calling that to him all the troubles and cares and losses and sufferings and burdens of the present are but a light and passing thing of little moment.

He sums up his glorious philosophy of life beautifully and movingly in the latter part of chapter 4 of this epistle—

> *"God has shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."*
>
> *"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us."*
>
> *"We are troubled on every side, but not distressed; perplexed, but not in despair . . ."* (2 Cor. 4:6-8).

How often are we too "perplexed!" But, like Paul, we must never despair.

"Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down but not destroyed."

"Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day."

"For our light affliction which is but for a moment . . ."

This is how Paul sums up the intense, lifelong burden of suffering and sorrow that he endured for Christ—

". . . our LIGHT affliction which is BUT FOR A MOMENT worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

"We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen,"

"For the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:9, 16-18).

Go Forth to Him Without the Camp

"Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. For here we have no continuing city, but seek one to come" (Heb. 13:13-14).

The epistle to the Hebrews is a call to Jewish believers to leave the Law completely. The time had come for a final break. The Law given by Moses had served its purpose. The intervening period of transition between the death of Christ and the destruction of the Temple was nearly over.

God did not just give Israel a bare command to leave the Law. Rather He gave, in this epistle, a beautiful, satisfying, reasoned explanation and revelation of the infinitely better way in Christ. This is the message of Hebrews—how Christ so beautifully fulfills every type, answers every question, supplies every need.

It was a time of tremendous transition for the Jewish believer. Moses and the Law had been ingrained into every fiber of their national being for so long. Now the Old Covenant had waxed old and was ready to vanish away. The glorious New Covenant—the Abrahamic—was in force, established by the blood of Christ.

Those who were blindly wedded to the ritual of the old were lost and dismayed. But those who saw the purpose and meaning and deep typical significance of the glorious Law God had given Israel through Moses, were ready and eager for the change. Chapter 13, the final chapter, consists of personal exhortation and the great call to go forth in faith unto Christ without the camp, bearing his reproach.

* * *

"Let brotherly love continue" (v. 1).

Brotherly love is the key to everything. Without it, nothing can succeed; with it, nothing can fail. It was especially important at this great crisis of doctrinal transition during which the apostles wrote. It is equally important in the problems of today. We talk so much of love, but we so easily forget it, when issues are raised and emotions are aroused. Let us ever remember James' searching words:

"Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath, for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God."

In our ignorant self importance, we so often think our anger can advance God's glory.

"Be not forgetful to entertain strangers" (v. 2).

Notice the word "strangers." This is a command of God just as much as baptism is a command. Do we do it? Do we entertain strangers? When did we do it last?

There are two kinds of people in the world. One group is very large, one is very, very tiny—the small-minded and the big; the fleshly and the spiritual, the self-centered and the self-sacrificing. The Scriptures call them: goats and sheep, tares and wheat, unfaithful and faithful stewards of God's goods. It is quite easy to tell which group we belong to: "If we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged," "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers." The thought is broader than simply entertainment or hospitality. Literally it is, "of the love of strangers be not neglectful."

As the apostle says elsewhere (Gal. 6:10)—

"Do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."

Not just as an incidental, self-pleasing, meaningless hobby, but a full time, wholehearted, dedicated way of life.

* * *

"Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity as being yourselves also in the body" (v. 3).

This is the second greatest command—

"Love your neighbor as yourself."

Not just love your neighbor, that's quite common and meaningless in various self-satisfying degrees, but—

"Love your neighbor AS YOURSELF."

There is a world of difference.

Thank God there are some like this today! And their life is a glorious fulfillment of what life was meant to be. But how few they are! But they alone are Christ's true brethren and sisters, the only ones he will recognize when he comes. He makes this so abundantly clear in Matthew 25—

"When saw we thee hungry, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison?"

How blind we can be if we do not want to see!

* * *

"Marriage is honorable in all" (v. 4).

Rather, more correctly, as in the Revised Version and the Diaglott, "Let marriage be honorable among all." It is an exhortation, a command. Let everything to do with this major aspect of natural life be pure and beautiful and spiritual and

in harmony with the glorious ideal that God established at its beginning.

The world has made such a sad travesty and corruption and degradation and failure of what could be life's most beautiful and comforting and helpful natural aspect. How man always cheapens and degrades everything he touches! How childishly, how pitifully, they deck out and adorn their poor corrupting bodies, but how naked are their souls! God will judge all who corrupt His pure and holy ways.

* * *

"Let your conversation be without covetousness" (v. 5).

"Conversation" here means "custom, way of life, frame of mind, character, outlook." Covetousness is simply wanting something we do not need; and our needs are very, very few. This is the mainspring of the whole world's activities, but the brethren of Christ are called to a higher, more satisfying way of life. They are called to free themselves from the shackles of selfishness and desire, to fill their minds with the infinitely more satisfying joy of service to God and to man.

* * *

"Be content with such things as ye have" (v. 5).

Contentment is a wonderful blessing. It is one of God's greatest gifts to His children. It is the essential foundation of happiness and peace. Paul said to the Philippians, writing in bonds and from prison—

"I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content."

Surely one of the Spirit's greatest and most essential lessons! Until we learn this, we are children, wanting, wishing, desiring, seeking a mocking illusionary joy in getting and possessing—accumulating and hoarding, ever fearful of the morrow.

When we have learned this, we are men. We are ready for God's work; we have cleared the decks, we have girded our loins. We are ready to be useful in the divine purpose. We have become spiritual adults. We have found true peace and satisfaction and happiness and security.

* * *

"For He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (v. 5).

This was said to Jacob when he left home in fear of his brother and started out alone into the unknown.

It was said to Joshua, when he lost Moses, and found himself alone with the whole burden of Israel.

It was said to the humble young Solomon as he was about to take on the rulership of the nation after David.

Have we a right to appropriate the promise to ourselves?—

"I WILL NEVER LEAVE THEE OR FORSAKE THEE."

Clearly, from Paul's words here, we have, though it was never spoken generally, but to specific individuals at specific times. There is a comforting lesson here. God is no respector of persons.

"Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope."

Do we *believe* this promise that He will not forsake us? Are we willing to trust ourselves to it in faith? Are we willing to do, to our fullest means and abilities and resources, what comes to hand TODAY and leave provision for the MORROW to God? We are told earlier in this epistle that—

"He that cometh to God MUST BELIEVE—must have faith"

—and faith, says James, calls for deeds, not words. Why are we reminded (in Heb. 11) of all these wonderful things that ordinary weak, fearful men and women like ourselves have risen to through the power of living Faith? Is it not to teach us the solemn, vital truth that we, too, must, in perfect faith, follow the same path if we would reap the same reward?

* * *

"Remember them which have the rule over you" (v. 7).

Again, it is better in the Revised Version—"them which *had* the rule over you, which spoke unto you the Word of God." It is a calling to remembrance. He is clearly reminding them of former leaders, and their faithfulness to the end of their lives: *"considering the END of their conversation* (way of life)."

James (who was put to death by Herod) is the only one of the apostles whom we know would be in this category, but doubtless by this time, just before the destruction of Jerusalem, others had sealed their testimony with their blood. The last days of terrible vengeance were about to come on the guilty nation as Jesus had foretold. Patriotism would soon be at a fever pitch, and all who did not enter into the defense of the Mosaic institutions would be branded as traitors and cowards. This was the "time of trouble" of which Jesus had warned.

"Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and forever" (v. 8).

The emphasis is on the contrast between that which is eternal and unchanging, and that which is temporal and passing. The Law was a temporary arrangement. Christ is an eternal, living reality. Paul's reference clearly is back to the quotation from the Psalms given in chapter 1, which he applied there to Christ—

"Thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail."

Tremendous changes were impending for the Jewish race—God's ancient people—terrible, convulsive, destructive changes. They were to be cast out and scattered, the temple burnt, the city destroyed, the land plundered and desolated.

In the process, the whole Mosaic framework would of necessity collapse and come to an end. How urgent, then, that they be anchored to that which would never, could never, change.

"Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and forever."

The one fixed point in all Creation; the Nail fastened in a sure place, the Cornerstone of the eternal Temple, the Priest forever after the order of Melchizedek, made—

"Not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life."

For us, too, the message is the same. The changing background is different but the eternal alternative to which we are called is the same.

"The things that are seen are temporal"

—for the Gentile just as for the Jew. We live as Israel did then, at a time of tremendous and revolutionary change. Change in everything in the world around us, its standards, morals, way of life, the patterns of world power and control and influence—all are in violent flux. There are no fixed points of reference anymore. The sea and the waves are roaring.

Nations throughout the earth who have slept in backward obscurity while the white man has ruled and seized and plundered, and oppressed, are now rising in long pent-up and held-back blind fury. Warfare—domination of his fellow man—always man's chief occupation and delight, is daily opening up broader avenues of cruelty, horror, and mass murder on a hitherto undreamed of scale. This is twentieth century civilization.

And in what was once the Christadelphian body, vast and destructive changes are well advanced with their pernicious work, and gathering momentum.

Surely, as in the last terrible days of Israel's Commonwealth, we need to be reminded, "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and forever." Here alone is reality, stability, continuity, eternity.

* * *

Paul, in the next few verses, leads up to the great climax of the whole epistle—the trumpet call (v. 13)—

"Let us go forth therefore unto him, without the camp, bearing his reproach."

"For here we have no continuing city, but seek one to come."

It was a call to Israel to leave behind every aspect of Gentilism—the way of the world—the mind of the flesh. Soon in our readings we shall read again John's words—

"Love not the world, neither the things of the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

"For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father but of the world."

In leading up to the climax of his appeal, Paul calls attention to a strange and wonderful aspect of the Law—a hidden mystery woven right into the fabric of the Law—in fact, placed at the very heart and apex of the whole Mosaic system.

The great day in Israel was the Day of Atonement, the tenth day of the seventh month—still kept in mechanical, ritualistic ignorance, but as a wonderful witness, three thousand years after its establishment, by blind, wandering Israel—Yom Kippur.

All the ceremonies and sacrifices of the Mosaic dispensation focussed toward this one solemn, yearly event when the High Priest, in a completely deserted and empty Tabernacle, went into the Most Holy Place to make atonement with the sacrificial blood.

This supreme sacrifice—the sacrifice whose blood entered the Most Holy—must be burned without the camp.

It was not to be consumed upon the Altar, and no man in the whole Mosaic system might partake of its flesh.

The one great central sacrifice, to which all the year's repeated sacrifices pointed, must be burned entirely outside the whole Mosaic organization. Here, in its crowning event, the Law portrayed its own inadequacy and pointed to the one great sacrifice for sin who would establish righteousness and open

a way over, above, beyond, and outside of the Law of fleshly ordinances given to Israel through Moses.

Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. We have here no continuing city, no ties to the present, no interest in earthly things.

Paul concludes with a beautiful prayer that God may lead them to a practical application of these things to themselves, without which all is meaningless; that He may in His love, and by His marvelous power, make them perfect in purity and holiness without which no man shall see God.

> *"Now the God of peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the Everlasting Covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen"* (Heb. 13:20-21).

A Brother Beloved

"Yet for love's sake I rather beseech thee."

PAUL'S LETTER TO PHILEMON

Philemon differs from all the rest of the Bible in that it is strictly a private letter on a personal matter written to an individual friend. The only other private letter to an individual in the Bible is John 3, to Gaius, but there the subject and purpose is more general. Timothy and Titus are ecclesial and doctrinal communications.

Philemon was a brother in Colosse converted to the Truth by Paul. Onesimus was a runaway slave belonging to Philemon who made contact with Paul in Rome—perhaps in repentance, perhaps in realization of the danger of his position. Paul says he had previously been unprofitable to Philemon so perhaps he had taken advantage of the kindness of a lenient owner.

In association with Paul he accepted the Truth and was baptized, and then Paul sent him back to make peace with Philemon. This epistle is the letter he carried from Paul to Philemon.

This epistle has been used both to support slavery (in that Paul sent him back) and to condemn it (in that Paul said, "Not now as a slave, but a brother beloved"). Actually it is on a much higher plane than either to specifically approve or condemn one particular aspect of the world of sin. It rises far above it, from temporals to eternals and leaves the question of slavery as such far below as among unimportant, passing earthly things.

The whole spirit is summed up in those words just referred to—"No longer a slave but a brother beloved." To the extent that Philemon comprehended and accepted the fulness of this, to that extent the slavery would cease to exist.

In this brief message there can be discerned, skilfully woven together and either expressed or implied, fourteen separate arguments in favor of reconciliation on Philemon's part.

* * *

According to the Law of Moses, an escaped slave was not to be returned to his owner, but Paul sends him back under the law of Christ. Is then, the law of Christ less humane, less enlightened, less merciful, more in sympathy with slavery, than the Law of Moses?

On the contrary, Paul's action indicates the very opposite. Moses' Law would release Onesimus from his obligation, or at

least it would have released Paul from the obligation of giving up Onesimus to Philemon, but the law of Christ called for a repentance and a seeking of reconciliation, and a giving to Philemon the opportunity of granting freely what had been taken from him against his will.

This epistle is clearly related in time and circumstance to the epistles of Ephesus and Colosse, especially the latter. They are from Rome and sent about the same time—62 AD, near the end of Paul's two years imprisonment. Ephesians and Colossians contain several parallel passages and were borne by the same messenger, Tychicus, from the same place.

Philemon and Colossians were both carried by Onesimus and in each the same six persons were saluted, (with Colossians bearing an additional salutation from Justus)—

IN PHILEMON:	IN COLOSSIANS:
Epaphras	Epaphras
Marcus	Marcus
Aristarchus	Aristarchus
Demas	Demas
Luke	Luke
Onesimus	Onesimus
	Justus

We are not told where Philemon lived, and we would not know from the epistle to him alone, but we learn from Colossians that Archippus, who was of Philemon's household, was of Colosse.

* * *

In this one personal letter, we see a slightly different Paul. He plays lightly and gently with all the names as if to add informality and intimacy and appeal to the message.

Onesimus means "profitable," so Paul speaks of his former unprofitableness but now his profitableness to both Philemon and Paul.

Philemon means "beloved" from Philema—a kiss—and so Paul addresses him.

Apphia is an affectionate diminutive for "brother or sister," and so Paul calls her "Apphia the sister" (as it should be and as RV gives it, and the best manuscripts).

Archippus means "Master of the horse"—a military term, so Paul calls him "fellow-soldier."

But there is without a doubt far more to "fellow-soldier" than just a passing play upon a name. Paul often introduces the conception of warfare. It is a very apt and instructive compari-

son, and to Paul—a prisoner of Jesus Christ and for the sake of the Gospel—a real and ever-present fact.

Life in the Truth IS a warfare. It *must* be so if we are faithful. All aspects of warfare find their counterpart in the Truth: the call, the sacrifice, the separation and leaving behind of the things of the world, the training and the discipline, the hardship and the self-denial, the singleness of purpose, the armor and the weapons, the unquestioning allegiance and obedience to the supreme commander, the existence of the enemy, the close, smooth, tightly-integrated unity of action so essential to victory, the combat and the danger—not with carnal weapons but with spiritual weapons in implacable hostility to everything carnal and fleshly.

In this one word—fellow-soldier—Paul links Archippus inseparably with himself in all these things, and in the glorious assurance of the final victory. In the Colossians, Paul finds it necessary to gently and publicly remind Archippus of his responsibilities in the Truth (4:17)—

> *"Say to Archippus, take heed to the ministry which thou hast received of the Lord, that thou fulfill it."*

So perhaps, "fellow-soldier" here is also meant to stir Archippus to a clearer remembrance of his partnership with Paul in the glorious Gospel warfare.

* * *

It is very fitting in itself that Paul's one private letter left for us should be an earnest plea and fervent expression of love and unity for a slave—a class that was then treated as less than human. Paul calls him his son, his brother, and his own heart.

It is probable, in the very nature of things, that slave-owners would be very few among the brethren. The vast majority would be either slaves, or poor free men. The Gospel was preached to the poor, and its principles have the greatest appeal to them.

This epistle enters into the Brotherhood's relation to slavery more than any other part of the New Testament. Paul gives instruction concerning slaves and masters in Corinthians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Timothy, but here is an actual example and a whole epistle bearing on the matter.

In the Roman Empire in New Testament times slaves outnumbered the free. Very often the slaves were in chains continually day and night. The master had power of life and death. They had little or no rights or protection of law, no

property, no true marriage, no choice of a mate—their master gave or took mates at his will.

The children belonged to the master as slaves for any use or purpose the master desired. Runaway slaves usually received torture, branding, and often a cruel death.

If our version were more consistently translated, this aspect of New Testament times would be more obvious: three-quarters of all the appearances of the word "servant" in the New Testament should be translated "slave," as in some of the more modern versions.

* * *

The Bible has been accused of condoning and even supporting this human evil. This is due to two universal misunderstandings concerning—

1. The purpose of the Bible.

2. The deep import of its teaching, fully comprehended.

Through much of history, and almost to the present, slavery has been a major aspect of human society. Actually, it is a much wider and more inclusive thing than generally regarded. That is, all dictatorship is actually slavery; all industrial and economic oppression is actually slavery, especially where the victim's circumstances leave him no choice but to submit.

It has been a universal characteristic of man to seek to oppress and enslave his fellowman and use him to increase his own wealth, power, and leisure.

Slavery in its various forms—fiefdom, serfs, peasantry, etc., has been the common lot of the poor up until very recent times, and practical slavery still exists in much of the world today, where the few rich who own all the land exploit and oppress the vast and hopeless multitude of the poor.

Slavery is just one part of the great human fabric of evil and wickedness. For the Bible to seek to abolish slavery would require it to write the laws for all nations, appoint all rulers, and enforce justice by divine power. This would be the Millennium (which will come in God's own proper time).

The greatest slavery of all, before which all else pales into insignificance, is man's slavery to his own selfishness and fleshly desires, and to this all are in bondage. Most, indeed, are eager victims with no desire for freedom. This is the deep root of the weed to which we must lay the axe of Scripture. Chopping off the branches only makes the evil fruit grow bigger.

The Bible's purpose is not to reform the world—yet. Its present purpose is to call out and prepare a people for God. The present evil constitution of man is the necessary furnace of affliction for the purifying of the saints.

The Bible is concerned with the character of the individual, the release from the universal slavery of self and sin, and the preparation for God and eternity.

It tells the slave to serve his master, whether he be good or bad, as service done to God and accepted by God. It tells the master to treat the slave as he himself would desire to be treated, with perfect justice and mercy, even as he hoped in mercy to be treated by his Master—Christ.

The Bible is not out to put odd and futile patches on a thoroughly corrupt and fleshly constitution of things, but to perfect personal relationships and prepare individuals for divinity. The principles of the commands of Christ, spiritually comprehended and faithfully applied, would completely transform and beautify ALL human and social relationships.

Paul in this epistle applies these principles to an actual master-slave relationship. He sends the runaway and disobedient slave back to his master in submission and repentance, and he exhorts the master to accept him, not as a slave, but as a beloved brother in Christ to whom Paul himself was a willing slave and for whom he was even then in actual chains. And he seals the bond of brotherhood between them with his own infinite love for both.

It is notable that Paul's fullest instructions concerning masters and slaves occur in the two epistles which appear to have been written and sent at the same time as this—one to the same place; that is, Colossians and Ephesians.

Similarly at the close of Colossians he calls Epaphras the "slave of Christ," the only time he separately applies this term to anyone but himself.

It would seem that he is attempting to soften and dignify the position of the natural slave by reminding the brotherhood of the honor and dignity of their slavery to Christ unto life eternal. He shows how a mark of natural ignominy can be a badge of spiritual glory.

The instruction in Ephesians (which is the fullest) occurs in 6:5-9. We note that in three successive verses, he says they must serve *as unto Christ*, and not to men, and he promises by the Spirit that such service will be accepted and rewarded *as done to Christ himself.*

Our state and circumstances in this life are utterly unimportant because of its brevity and because of the transcending importance of other greater things. Whatever God wills is best, for it is designed to forward His purpose and prepare us for a place in that purpose.

The instruction for slave-owners is all in one verse (9) but it is all-inclusive—

"Do the same thing to them."

—work on the same principle that EVERYTHING WE DO MUST BE DONE AS TO AND FOR CHRIST—

"Forbearing—giving up, refraining from—threatening."

Threatening anyone is entirely out of the question for a brother of Christ. If the relationship is not in mutual love and respect, it is not acceptable to God. This command alone would transform the whole picture.

"Knowing that your Master also is in heaven: neither is there respect of persons with him."

He will deal with us as we deal with others. On the same subject, Colossians adds an instruction which, fully comprehended, spells the end of slavery (4:1)—

"Masters, give unto your slaves that which is JUST AND EQUAL, knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven."

Brethren were required to treat slaves the same as they are required to treat all men—with love, gentleness, kindness, and humility. THERE ARE NO EXCEPTIONS TO THESE RULES. This would raise and purify the relationship far above anything the world dreams of.

Even in the Roman world there were cases of deep devotion of slaves to benevolent masters.

The brethren and sisters of the first century had no experience of a society not built on slavery. This was an inseparable part of the only world they knew. They had much to learn. The lesson for us is to examine ourselves for prejudice or preconceived worldly notions absorbed from our fleshly surroundings that have no spiritual reason or justification.

We are all to a large extent creatures of our times, blind sheep following the crowd. We take things for granted as right and acceptable just because the wicked world around us so takes them for granted. We do not stop to think things through for ourselves independently, strictly on scriptural, spiritual principles.

"Paul a prisoner" (v. 1).

Five times in this short letter Paul refers to his bonds. He appears to be associating himself in bondage with Onesimus the slave, in order to appeal more strongly to Philemon.

Only in this letter does he so introduce himself. His normal introduction is "Paul the apostle," but here, in this personal letter of entreaty, he keeps his authority and apostleship in the background and emphasizes his bondage.

Only in two other epistles does he omit the title "apostle" and those were to the two ecclesias to whom he felt most close—Philippi and Thessalonica.

* * *

"To our beloved Apphia, and Archippus" (v. 2).

These are members of Philemon's household. It would seem most probable Apphia was Philemon's wife and possibly Archippus his son; but any relationship or none at all is possible. Certainly they must be an intimate part of the household or they would not have been included in a letter on a domestic matter. They were obviously concerned in the problem.

* * *

"Grace to you, and peace" (v. 3).

These are not just standard words of greeting, but very real and vital things. Without grace from God we are just ordinary, flesh-thinking creatures; and there is no true peace except that which God gives those who give their lives to serving Him in love.

If Philemon was to hope for "grace and peace" from God, he must extend grace and peace to Onesimus.

* * *

"I thank God, making mention of thee always in my prayers" (v. 4).

Another very real and essential thing—thanksgiving and prayer. Paul had many, many brethren and sisters always in his mind and in his prayers. These are the true spiritual realities of life. This is living fully and abundantly, largely and joyfully.

* * *

"Hearing of thy love and faith" (v. 5).

It is a joyful, comforting thing to hear of love and faith being manifested. It gives great encouragement in times of trial and stress. It indicates a healthy, hopeful, thriving condition. To see these things bringing forth fruit in others gives reality and purpose and confidence to our own faith.

Moreover, it creates a oneness, a feeling of closeness and partnership. When we see brethren and sisters putting first things first, we are drawn towards them in love. We can communicate. There is mutual understanding.

But when we see them absorbed in a multitude of empty, passing, present things, getting gain and seeking pleasure, there is a sad sense of distance and barrier and futility.

Paul could have commanded Philemon, by reason of his own authority in Christ, but commanding would not have taught any deep spiritual principles. Rather on the basis of Philemon's already manifested spiritual fruits and characteristics, Paul desires to build a broader understanding and more universal application.

Love, patience, humility, forgiveness, service, and submission to others are NOTHING if not perfectly consistent and completely universal, for to be anything they must be US, not just our convenient cloak for chosen occasions and chosen recipients.

A Christian slaveholder was really in a much more difficult position than a Christian slave, if he understood the principles of godliness and nonresistance to evil, and suffering ourselves to be defrauded.

To be a true brother of Christ he had to go in the face of some of the strongest prejudices of human opinion—the ones where personal advantage was most deeply at stake. The principles of Christ dissolve all human conventions and distinctions.

* * *

"Thy love toward ALL saints" (v. 5).

This must necessarily include the new brother Onesimus. There would be no exceptions, no respect of persons. Paul irresistibly builds his case on Philemon's own already manifested recognition of the true way of life.

* * *

"That the communication of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus" (v. 6).

What does this mean? "Communication" means fellowship, partnership, sharing together. It refers to the communion of mutual service between brethren in love, the deep unity of mutual giving and receiving. Both spiritual and material are inseparably combined in one.

"Effectual" means active, energetic, productive, fruitful.

"Acknowledgment" means (and is translated in other versions), perfect knowledge, full recognition, deep discernment.

The word is not just *gnosis*—"knowledge, realization, comprehension." Paul is praying that the goodness manifested by Philemon to the brotherhood may result in fuller knowledge and deep comprehension of the glorious blessings that are ours in Christ.

Is he praying that *others* may be enlightened by Philemon's example or that Philemon *himself* may be expanded and deepened in spiritual joy and knowledge as a result of, and as a blessing upon, his acts of loving fellowship?

Doubtless both thoughts are involved, but the latter would appear to be the principal one, and most in harmony with the spirit and purpose of the epistle, for Paul's aim is to lead Philemon to a growth in godliness.

* * *

"Though I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin thee that which is convenient" (v. 8).

That is, to command what is required, Paul had authority from Christ, as the apostle to the Gentiles, to enforce the law of Christ, by the guidance and power of the Spirit, throughout the ecclesias.

In a spiritual sense he stood in the same relation to Philemon as Philemon did to Onesimus. Yet for love's sake he chose to forgo his authority, and to entreat rather than to command. To command and enforce is to admit the failure of love—

"The law is not for the righteous, but for the lawless and disobedient."

The righteous does not need a law. All he needs is to be told what is desired—just the slightest hint—and he delights to comply in love.

If Paul had enforced his authority, he would have been contradicting and denying the very thing he was seeking; for he was trying to persuade Philemon to forgo *his* authority for the sake of love. By himself yielding, he brings great persuasion upon Philemon to yield. Much more can be accomplished by yielding than by forcing. Forcing hardens resistance, while yielding melts resistance away.

* * *

"Paul the aged" (v. 9).

When Paul first is brought to our attention, he is spoken of as a young man. Within thirty years, according to all accepted reckonings, he was dead. At this time of writing to Philemon, he was probably fifty to sixty years old. How then, does he speak of himself here as "aged"?

Like Christ, though not to the same degree, the full and intense activity of his life was packed into a small compass. When we consider his experiences—the beatings, the hardships, the sleeplessness, the cold and hunger and long weary laborings—we can see how he was "Paul the aged" in that short period of time.

Life is not just a matter of existing for a certain length of time. It is doing. It is intense, and purposeful, and useful activity.

By scriptural standards, living in relaxed personal self-pleasing is not even life at all in the true sense, but a hideous form of living death—

> *"She* (or he) *that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth"* (1 Tim. 5:6).

* * *

> *"A prisoner of Jesus Christ."*

The thought is deeper than just that he was a prisoner *on account of* Jesus Christ. In the light of what he says elsewhere, it is clear that he sees himself as a prisoner, a bondman, a slave forever *OF* Jesus Christ, thankfully and joyfully.

The Roman chains he wore he saw as his chains of unity with, and suffering for, Christ. The Romans were but a passing and meaningless shadow, just the faint, hazy, flickering background. The vivid reality that Paul always saw in all his experiences and circumstance was Christ himself, ever beside him.

* * *

> *"A brother, both in the flesh and in the Lord"* (v. 16).

Though not necessarily required by this statement, it is quite possible that Onesimus was his own less fortunate half-brother, a son of his father, for a man's own children were slaves if their mother was his slave.

* * *

> *"Knowing thou wilt also do more than I say"* (v. 21).

Paul specified the principle and indicates the direction, but leaves it to Philemon's largeness of heart and depth of spiritual perception to determine how far.

This is a beautiful aspect of Christ's commands. At any particular time, brethren are at different levels of spiritual perception and experience, and this cannot be forced.

Paul seems to be clearly hinting here at complete freedom for the slave, but he could not presume to suggest it, far less

command it. It must come from the mind of Christ working within Philemon himself.

This, too, showed much more kindness and consideration to Philemon—giving him room to freely, voluntarily, manifest his goodness beyond what was asked. There are many lessons in wisdom and courtesy we can learn from this very brief letter from friend to friend.

There is a deep lesson for us in the basic form and nature of this letter itself, apart from the specific message it contains. We should study and copy its spirit and tone. We should learn to feel the affections and emotions it portrays, for Paul is not just being clever and diplomatic to gain his ends.

He is being sincere and Christlike and gentle and courteous, as all letters should be, especially to brethren. It illustrates the great change that must take place in us—from the natural to the spiritual.

The natural Paul—Saul, the self-righteous, self-important persecutor—could never have written a letter like this. He had to be completely transformed by the love of Christ and the inworking power of the Spirit. Every letter we write should be a manifestation of the mind of the Spirit. It should bear the stamp of the new man of love and gentleness and meekness.

The beauty of the law of Christ is that it fits every social circumstance, it solves every problem, and it raises every activity—even the simplest and meanest—to the level of direct communication with God, dignifying and glorifying every necessary activity of life, however humble it be.

The law of Christ gave a purpose and a nobility and the consolation of an eventual abundant reward and recompense, even to the most hopeless, miserable, and degraded toilings of the slave.

The teaching of Christ would cure all human ills, and create a universal brotherhood in which all distinctions and barriers would fall away, and all would serve and submit to one another in love.

> *"As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them."*

This of course will never prevail in this present dark world of sin and selfishness, but any who would please Christ must—in their own little personal world that is their life and their relationship to God and all mankind—act on this principle toward all without exception, regardless of what others may do.

Grace, Mercy, and Peace From God

"O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding vain and profane babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called" (1 Tim. 6:20).

THE FIRST EPISTLE TO TIMOTHY

Although we know little of Timothy's personal life, he is the best known and closest of Paul's fellow-laborers. He was brought into the Truth by Paul and is referred to as Paul's "own son in the Faith." He joined Paul's company on Paul's second journey, and worked with him thereafter till the end of Paul's life.

His father was a Gentile, and Timothy was not circumcised, although he knew the Holy Scriptures from childhood.

His mother and grandmother were faithful believers, but his father and grandfather were not so mentioned. It would appear from this that faithfulness was on the female side of the family, and probably against difficulties. Timothy's mother may have been given in marriage to a Gentile by her father, against her own mother's wishes.

Timothy's choice to accompany Paul and field of labor in the ecclesias was apparently indicated by the Holy Spirit, for Paul says, in writing to him about it (1 Tim. 1:18)—

"According to the prophecies which went before on thee."

Paul, we remember, made three major journeys throughout the Roman Empire, preaching the Truth and establishing ecclesias. Timothy lived at Lystra, in East Asia Minor. When Paul arrived here on his second journey, Timothy joined him and travelled eastward with him through Asia Minor to Troas, Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea.

When Paul was driven out of Berea, Timothy and Silas stayed to continue the work. Paul called them to him to Athens, then sent them back to Thessalonica where the persecution was severe on the brethren, as Paul wrote to the ecclesia there (1 Thess. 3:2-3)—

"To establish you and to comfort you concerning your faith that no man should be moved by these afflictions."

Persecution and afflictions were the usual lot of the early believers when they joined the "sect everywhere spoken against."

And the youthful Timothy, soon after his call to the work, is sent back to the danger scene to be a source of courage and strength to the new believers.

Some have assumed, from Paul's exhortations to him to "stir up the gift" that was in him, and to "endure hardness as a good soldier of Christ," and to "let no man despise" his youth, that Timothy was timid and hesitant and lacking in missionary zeal and fervor for the work of the Truth. But surely the picture we get of him in this his earliest appearance in the work, shows him to be exceptionally faithful, zealous, courageous, and devoted.

The most we can fairly infer from Paul's exhortations to him is that he may have been over-reluctant to use his authority in relation to older brethren than himself, and that he, like all—like even Paul himself—felt the weakness of the flesh and the need for encouragement to press forward in a dangerous and difficult and often lonely path.

A brother—especially a young brother—who is strongly motivated by love of the brethren and who recognizes his own human weakness, may be over-cautious about taking firm action against sin and error when firm action is called for.

We know how bro. Roberts, in his early days, experienced this agonizing conflict, and how bro. Thomas had to stir him to resolute action and separation from some who—though nominally accepting the Truth—were tolerating corruption of it. Bro. Thomas could see clearly that just protesting against error is not enough.

Jude gives us a command that should be one of our basic guidelines in all our prayerful efforts to defend and preserve the Truth (vs. 22-23)—

> *"Of some have compassion, MAKING A DIFFERENCE";*
> *"And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh."*

* * *

From Thessalonica, Timothy rejoined Paul at Corinth and stayed with him for the rest of the second journey.

He accompanied Paul on his third journey (which ended in Paul's arrest and being taken to Rome), three years of which was spent in Ephesus. He was with Paul on the return trip to Jerusalem, at the end of which a riot occurred in Jerusalem and Paul was imprisoned.

We have no record of Timothy while Paul was imprisoned in Caesarea, nor on the journey to Rome. He appears again with Paul in Rome—part of the time, at least, a prisoner himself—for Heb. 13:23 records that Timothy had been "set at liberty," as Paul himself was then expecting to be.

The first epistle to Timothy, where we find Paul had left him at Ephesus to set all things in the ecclesia in order there, appears to fit best into the period between Paul's two imprisonments. It is full of instruction and enlightenment about ecclesial affairs.

The second epistle to Timothy was clearly Paul's last epistle of all, for he is therein again imprisoned in Rome, and on the verge of execution, and he urgently calls Timothy to him.

Whether Timothy reached him in time we do not know, for this second epistle is the last we hear of either Paul or Timothy. There the record ends.

Of Timothy's value to Paul and of the difficult conditions under which Paul worked, we learn in Phil. 2:19-21—

> *"I trust to send Timothy shortly unto you . . . I have no man like-minded, who will naturally care for your state, for all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's."*

Would he have to say the same of us? Do we leave the labor to others, while we pursue our own comfort and material advantage? Let each of us ask himself this honestly and frankly—and DEMAND *an answer.*

Or would he find us walking in true wisdom, realizing the emptiness and briefness of present possessions and interests, and dedicated to God's work, laying hold of ETERNAL *treasure, that fadeth not away?*

* * *

Paul's first epistle to Timothy is all about his work in the ecclesia at Ephesus. He opens with a prayer for Timothy's spiritual well-being (1 Tim. 1:2):

> *"Unto Timothy: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."*

THESE ARE REAL THINGS; MORE REAL THAN ANYTHING TO DO WITH OUR PERISHING, DAY TO DAY EXISTENCE.

This is perhaps the most vital verse in the whole epistle. All the rest is important, detailed instruction about various things. But this is the actual key to life or death—

> *"Grace, mercy, and peace—from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."*

If we have this, we have everything: nothing else really matters or is important. If we do not have this, then no other possession in the world, or the world itself, would be of any value to us.

> *"Grace, mercy, and peace from God."*

A few from among mankind have this supreme blessing: the vast majority do not.

* * *

"GRACE"—the favorable attention, and love, and care, and comfort and guidance from God toward us. To come within the scope of His glorious light—to be accepted as part of His chosen family, constantly overshadowed by His angelic protection.

This grace is extended without partiality to all who, in Truth, yield themselves entirely to Him, and ONLY to such. God makes no exceptions, plays no favorites. Just holding certain beliefs, and going to the meetings, and being technically "in the Truth" is not enough. We must give all to Him, holding nothing back. This must overshadow and dominate everything in our lives—all our waking moments.

Then, and then ONLY, *we enter into the glory of the grace of God.*

* * *

"MERCY"—the overlooking, in loving understanding, of all our shortcomings and weaknesses and failures and ugliness and fleshliness—IF we, like Paul, agonize to repudiate them and be free of them.

To obtain the mercy of God, the most important requirement is to recognize to its fullness our own absolute NEED for mercy—our utter helplessness and miserableness without it. God is the essence of all holiness and purity and perfection. We are weak, ignorant, unclean mortal creatures seeking His exalted fellowship.

And, related to this, the more we recognize our own need for mercy, the more merciful we should be toward the faults and weaknesses of others—

> *"Love beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things and thinketh no evil; love covereth a multitude of sins."*

This does not mean ignoring or excusing or condoning what is wrong, any more than a good doctor ignores disease or neglects treatment or won't use the knife, just because he is too "kindhearted."

TRUE *love and* TRUE *mercy are always deeply concerned with correcting what is wrong.*

Rather it means that our attitude toward the erring should always be fellowfeeling and understanding and deep and

prayerful concern for their ultimate well-being. Always ready—not to condemn—but to help and encourage and forgive—

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

MERCY DOES NOT INTERFERE WITH DUTY AND OBEDIENCE TO COMMANDS.

Commands tell us to separate from persistent error, in order to preserve the health of the body and the soundness of the Faith. We have no choice, if we are faithful. But it must be done kindly and sorrowfully, not harshly or self-righteously—

"In the spirit of meekness, considering thyself lest thou also be tempted."

* * *

"And PEACE." Peace is not stagnation: not merely a dull and uneventful relief for the elderly and tired of life. Peace is essential for all—young and old—though we may not realize it.

Peace is the basic blessing we all need most, if we are God's.

It only comes through the grace and mercy of God. Peace is an impervious mental shield against all fears and disquietudes. Peace is perfect, relaxed harmony and tranquility of mind and spirit. Peace is primarily "peace with God"—

"We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

To have peace with God makes all other conflict harmless and unimportant. It can only come with complete, undivided dedication to one supreme object of life, for peace is essentially oneness and undividedness.

It is not freedom from external conflict: that's not important. It is freedom from INNER conflict. Jesus said, just before the terrible suffering of his crucifixion—

"Peace I leave with you: my peace I give unto you":

"In the world ye shall have tribulation; but in me ye SHALL have peace";

"Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

And Paul, chained and in prison for the sake of the Gospel, tells the Philippian brethren to take everything to God in prayer, and assures them that in so doing—

"The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, SHALL keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ."

* * *

"I besought thee to abide at Ephesus, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine" (1:3).

This is Timothy's first and principal duty at Ephesus—the preservation in the ecclesia of true doctrine. Paul was always deeply and actively concerned with the preservation of the Truth and suppression of error in the Body. He fully realized this was the foundation upon which all else must be built.

> *"Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions rather than godly edifying"* (v. 4).

This is a very important distinction that must be borne in mind in all our studies, for it means the difference between success and failure.

It is not enough just to study the Word of God: we must study it *with a purpose*—and we must study it with the *right* purpose: to learn God's ways and will, so we may draw closer to His requirements and manifest the beauty of holiness in our lives.

There are many side-issues and dead-ends and unanswerable problems that we can ardently pursue that just "minister questions" rather than "godly edifying."

We must consciously concentrate on getting the practical lesson and instruction for ourselves—the guidance that will change US more and more from fleshly to spiritual.

Some study the Bible all their lives and become very proficient in it, but it never changes their character or way of life. The true purpose of the Word, says Paul in the second epistle, is for—

> *"Reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."*

He says the same here (v. 5)—

> *"The end—the purpose, the WHOLE REASON—for the commandment is love, a pure heart, a good conscience, and a genuine faith."*

All God's Word is to develop us—personally and individually—in these characteristics. To get side-tracked, or as he says in verse 6, to "swerve" from this is "vain jangling"—noise and effort without purpose.

* * *

> *"Desiring to be teachers of the Law"* (v. 7).

The Law of Moses is meant. Reverting to the forms and bondage of the Law seems to be the principal problem that troubled the ecclesias from the beginning, and we see the development of this deadly tendency in its fulness in all the ecclesiastical rituals and structure of the Catholic church.

We, too, must ever be on guard against ritualism and technicality to the detriment of the true spirit of *love and personal holiness.*

Paul says (v. 9), that the Law was not for the righteous, but for the lawless and disobedient. As he told the Galatians who were being similarly led astray, the Law of Moses is not the way of life.

The Abrahamic Covenant is the way of life. The Law was added "because of transgression" (that is, the Law was "for the unrighteous"), until the Seed of Abraham should come to whom the Abrahamic Covenant was made.

This leads Paul (vs. 11-17), to a consideration of his own deliverance from the same erroneous devotion to the Mosaic Law which had caused him to reject and oppose Christ and to persecute Christ's followers.

But in God's mercy, because he was sincere, he was shown the right way, and was given mercy and forgiveness as an example of Christ's goodness and kindness.

He concludes chapter 1 by emphasizing Timothy's responsibility to fight a good fight and to defend the true Faith and to *separate from the ecclesia any teaching otherwise.*

* * *

Beginning chapter 2—

"I exhort that, first of all . . ."

—note this especially—

"FIRST OF ALL, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks for ALL MEN."

Is that our attitude toward the world?—true concern for them, and CONSTANT prayer? There is a danger that we tend to be too self-centered and narrow in our interests and affections, ignorant of, and ignoring, other people's needs and sorrows, wrapped up in our "specially-chosen" selves and writing off the world as hopeless.

If God is concerned with the sparrows that fall, and the young ravens that cry, certainly He is concerned with the *people,* as Paul says here (v. 4)—

"God will have all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the Truth."

This must be OUR concern, too, if we are His true children, and not hypocrites. It is so easy to self-righteously attend our own comfortable little meetings, and then spend the rest of our time on our own selfish, temporal interests and welfare.

We must get *out* of ourselves and keep before our minds the broad world picture: God is concerned with the world, and is working with the world.

The true children of God have no time for any personal non-essentials. Their hearts and minds and lives are FILLED *with serving God and helping their fellowmen.*

Paul does not just say "prayers" for all men, and pass on, but he stops to emphasize and elaborate—

"Supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks."

There is no sharp distinction of meaning between the first three, but clearly Paul is strongly stressing the range, and depth, and importance of the command. It is not just a cursory and passing mention in our own otherwise self-centered prayers as a select little group.

Our prayers for all men must be real, and earnest, and sustained, and run the whole range of "supplication" and "intercession" and "giving of thanks."

And why "giving of thanks" for all men? What does that mean? What is there to be thankful about in relation to "all men?"

It means we must, like the prophets of old, and above all, like Jesus himself, identify ourselves with the sorrows and burdens and problems of mankind, praying for them and thanking God on their behalf for the unappreciated blessings He pours on all alike, in the hope that for our sakes mercy and blessing may be extended more widely.

This matter of prayer is something very real and very important. Prayer is perhaps the strongest and most marvelous of all God's provisions. It is a way whereby a man can extend his influence for good far beyond his natural powers—without limit—into eternal things.

We are constantly told in the Scriptures of the power and importance of prayer. We have just experienced a very serious riot in Detroit, the worst the nation has known, with untold suffering and untold loss and destruction.

Would a deeper realization of our responsibilities, and a fuller fulfilment of our duties in this respect, have avoided or lessened this?

God has given us a tremendous instrument for good—for the good of man. Are we using it to the fullest—or are we too wrapped up in our own selfish unimportances?

Truly there is much to be learned from the Scripture, if we are to be accepted of God.

Of course, our primary and overwhelming concern for mankind is their eternal salvation; but present, temporal help and good is still an important aspect of the work of the Truth.

And prayer. Always prayer. The heart-felt, heart-rent supplication for the pitiful, purposeless miseries of God-ignorant mankind, vainly seeking a self-made peace and a non-existent, impossible happiness, tragically destroying themselves with their own blind "wisdom."

Chapter 2:9-15 concerns the position of sisters. Two points are strongly emphasized. First, modesty and reserve in dress and deportment, with inner rather than surface ornamentation. Secondly, silence in the ecclesia.

Men and women are very different in many ways. The modern world, in its godless stupidity, ignores this divinely-attested fact. Each sex has its own special weakness and its own strengths. Each has its own special place and function in the Body of Christ.

To the extent a sister overstepped either of these divine instructions, to that extent she cheapens herself and lessens her true spiritual usefulness in the Body.

It is always wisdom to make sure we are well over on the safe side of any command—to try to realize and conform to its spiritual purpose and value.

These are not merely arbitrary and restrictive commands. Rather they are to make sisters more fitted and more suited to the fulfillment of their own very real and very necessary part in the welfare and activity of the Body.

Sisters are freed from many things that burden brethren, that they may be better suited to accomplish other things as important, or more important, in God's sight.

* * *

Chapter 3:1-17: The qualifications of bishops, or elders (arranging brethren), and deacons (serving brethren). These qualifications, of course, are required in *all* brethren, but the presence of the required qualifications must especially be assured in all chosen to serve the ecclesia.

Verse 2: First of all, a bishop must be blameless—that is, above reproach. Truly Solomon says, a little folly in him that is in reputation is like the stink of dead flies in good ointment.

A serving brother must avoid anything that could reflect on the Truth, or discourage his brethren, or cause the weak to

stumble, or the evil to rejoice. All work in the Truth is to be aspired to in the true spirit of serving God most fully and acceptably, but such work and positions have great added responsibilities.

The qualifications given, as best their true meaning can be determined, are these:—

Vigilant: wide awake, watchful—discerning and aware—concerned for needs and dangers.

Sober: grave, self-restrained and self-controlled: not excitable or impulsive or flippant or silly.

Orderly: decent and correct, well-mannered, courteous, considerate of others.

Hospitable: literally, a "lover of strangers": one who is happy and eager to care for others.

Able and ready at all times to teach: enthusiastic in the Word.

Not quarrelsome or argumentative, but conciliatory and understanding.

Not concerned with material things: heedless of self.

Patient, meek, and gentle.

Having a good reputation among outsiders—that is, having established a consistent public record of reliability and pure living.

Ruling his own house wisely and well.

These are God's DIRECT COMMANDS, and it is vitally important that we weigh them fully when selecting serving brethren, or desiring to be serving brethren.

* * *

Chapter 4 is related throughout and deals with the contrast between self-imposed rules of physical self-denial and obsession with physical exercise, and true spiritual exercise and development of the whole man unto godliness through study of and obedience to the Scriptures.

It is easy to get these things out of proportion—to be obsessed with physical well-being to the neglect of the infinitely more vital spiritual growth and development and well-being.

Physical health, no matter how well attended to, is only good for a few short mortal years. Soon the grave claims the best-kept mortal bodies. But spiritual health, diligently pursued, is doubly profitable—it is good for eternity, and it will also teach us wisdom and gain us divine care for the present existence.

"Commanding to abstain from meats" (v. 3).

There are all sorts of arbitrary self-denials which gender pride and self-satisfaction, and are directly contrary to the true spirit of praise and thankfulness that recognizes God's loving hand in His provisions for man.

As usual, we see again in the Great Apostasy—the Catholic Church—the full development of these various human theories against which Paul struggled—

> *"Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving."*

The close of the chapter is the true picture of self-discipline and self-development—

> *"Give attention to reading."*

To reading *what?* There can only be one possible answer in the case: the Scriptures. Let us mark this well. Here again it is the difference between life and death—

> *"Give attention to reading."*

Don't just read, but *"give attention"* (v. 13)—

> *"Meditate on these things."*

Keep them uppermost in your attention—train your mind to center on God and on His Word at every opportunity, ALL day—"Give thyself WHOLLY to them," he says (v. 15).

It must be a consistent way of life—and surely it is obvious this is the *only* wise and reasonable course! We are dealing with the glorious things of eternity and our possible relation to them—if by any means we gain that great prize.

Could any course therefore be more foolish than to make anything less than the FULLEST EFFORT WE CAN *to succeed?*

Surely world events are crying out to us how insecure present things are and how close the end is upon us! Let us be sure we are—for the brief time left—found watching and working.

* * *

> *"Rebuke not an elder, but intreat him as a father; and the younger men as brethren—the women as mothers and sisters"* (5:1-2).

The relationship in the Truth is a close, personal, family relationship—that is, it should attain to the mutually affectionate and tender ideal that family relationship *should* be, though often sadly is not.

Relationship in the Truth is not a cold, impersonal, critical business or mere technical relationship. There MUST be a deep, personal, living feeling and closeness.

If there is, the necessary mutual reproof and correction will be gently offered and lovingly accepted. Pointing out where we

feel others are wrong is often necessary and often a duty. Done in the right spirit, it is an evidence of love and care.

BUT—it is one of the hardest, if not THE hardest, thing to do RIGHT—in the Spirit and not in the flesh. Fleshly fault-finding comes so easily and naturally to all.

First of all, we should so live *all the time,* and have such a continuous and strong relationship of affection and understanding among us, that reproof could be given and received with perfect freedom in the spirit of love. This is an ideal never fully attained but earnestly to be striven for.

Chapter 5:3-16 is about widows. It is very interesting and has a practical bearing on today's problems. How should the aged and dependent be cared for?

The emphatic over-all teaching of this portion is that, generally speaking, it is a private and not an ecclesial matter.

Well-meaning individuals may feel this should be ecclesially organized and undertaken on a large and official manner. We see this trend among those who copy the world's ways.

But all the emphasis and force of Paul's words here is on restricting any ecclesial or organized participation, except in very special circumstances, and all in the direction of commanding and enforcing individual responsibility.

And surely in the light of what we see and hear of well-meant activities in this direction today contrary to Paul's commands, we can see not only the scripturalness of the commands but also the wisdom.

Three times he stresses this basic principle—verses 4, 8, 16. This is the authority and wisdom of the Spirit speaking.

Paul says it is acceptable for "widows indeed"—those with absolutely no one who should care for them—to be taken on as a regular ecclesial responsibility, but EVEN THEN only with several rigid and demanding restrictions (vs. 9-10)—

> *"Let not a widow be taken into the number under three score years old, having been the wife of one man, well reported of for good works: if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed EVERY good work."*

What of others who are equally in need, but do not so qualify?

The general and plentiful and consistent instruction of the Scriptures concerning love and care for others, especially

those of the Household would adequately take care of all needs in a Body that is truly and spiritually alive. The vital divine command to ALL is—

"He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none, and he that hath meat let him do likewise."

All who are TRULY *in the Truth will not only be willing, but thankfully happy and* EAGER *to do so, as children of a bountiful Father. For those not of this enlightened and spiritual disposition, God has nothing to offer. "As a man soweth, so shall he reap."*

Institutionalized charity is a cold and humiliating and depersonalized thing. Individual and private love and care is a beautiful, mutually-blessing bond of perfectness. Officially organized schemes have great dangers, great problems, and great disadvantages.

We must be guided by the Spirit's teaching, whether we see its wisdom or not.

But we often can see the wisdom, especially if we first submit in humble faith. In this case we can clearly observe at present many ill-effects from schemes that ignore the Spirit's teaching—

Encouragement of shirking personal responsibility:

Constant pressuring for money to keep ambitious schemes afloat, like the world's churches;

Unhappy and unsatisfactory conditions of the inmates;

The constant danger of an ever-growing centralized bureaucracy, and an organization held together more and more by its external structure and less and less by the Truth.

* * *

There is one very striking verse in the instruction about widows (v. 6)—

"She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth."

Life is given to man for ONE REASON ONLY—to serve and glorify God—to give Him pleasure and to be useful in His eternal purpose.

Pleasure in the abstract is not of itself wrong. There is, in fact, infinitely more true pleasure and enjoyment, and satisfaction in the Way of Life than the way of death. David said of that glorious condition to which he looked forward in faith—

"In Thy presence is fullness of joy, and at Thy right hand are pleasures forevermore."

But Paul is talking about self-pleasing as a motive, compared with God-pleasing as a motive.

It is the motive and the motivation that determines whether our service is spiritual or carnal.

If we serve God simply to get ourselves into the Kingdom and enjoy its pleasure, this is merely a higher and disguised form of the same old selfishness.

But if we forget ourselves, and serve God out of the joy of love and gratitude and worship and devotion, we shall find all other things are added unto us.

Pleasure sought selfishly is never found. It only comes as a by-product of love and service.

* * *

Chapter 6 is all related, though the relationship may not be immediately apparent. It is about slavery, and godliness, and contentment, and riches, and the good fight of faith, and finally and above all, defending and preserving that glorious treasure entrusted to our care.

The common theme throughout is that present conditions and circumstances—either of handicap or privilege—from the extremes of abject slavery on the one hand to abundant riches on the other—are *utterly unimportant,* and not to be either rebelled against or sought. Life is too short.

The important thing is GODLINESS WITH CONTENTMENT. Not just godliness, not just contentment, but godliness with contentment. A faithful life; and a joyful, peaceful, thankful mind.

This chapter is the complete opposite—the complete rebuttal—of the common, natural philosophy of life. The natural mind rebels against slavery and poverty, and desires freedom and material possessions. This is the highest ideal of the natural mind—the "Great Society."

The Scriptures do not condone slavery. But neither do they seek to destroy it, any more than they seek to directly destroy any others of the vast multitude of inequities that make up natural human society.

The purpose of God is, at the present time, concerned with something on an entirely different and vastly higher plane—PREPARING A PEOPLE FOR ETERNITY BY ADVERSITY.

And, in God's wisdom, slavery and poverty are sometimes part of the general, evil, human background that God is using to develop character and shape His determined ends.

Slaves are told to count their owners worthy of all honor. This is galling to the pride of the flesh, but as the command of God, faithfully obeyed, it is strengthening to the spirit.

Anything that contributes to pride and self-satisfaction—possessions, position, knowledge, power, prestige—hinders in the Way of Life.

Anything that contributes to humility and self-abasement and recognition of weakness and need—slavery, poverty, low position—helps in the Way of Life.

To the "wise" of the world, this is incomprehensible folly.

If the owners are believers, slaves are still to accept the condition, and do faithful service, not to expect release because their owners are their brethren. The Gospel was not meant to disrupt or reform human society as such. Any tendency in that direction, however agonizingly well-meant, would divert and dissipate the power of the Gospel among men. Therefore, he says (vs. 3-5)—

> *"If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness,"*
>
> *"He is proud, knowing nothing, doting about questions,"*
>
> *"Supposing that gain is godliness."*

What does this phrase mean—"supposing that gain is godliness"—and what connection does it have with the general line of exhortation about slavery?

It is this: they confused the aim and purpose of the Gospel—which is godliness—with the aim of present human betterment and improvement of social conditions. *This is sacrificing an eternal betterment for a mere temporal one.*

Their course, though well-meant, would at best bring only present, external, material betterment; and in the endless upheaval and striving for present good, the eternal purpose would be confused and lost.

The basic principle involved is a vital one, and one we all need to learn lest we well-meaningly fall into the same diversion of effort and attention. It is this—

Accept all outward conditions as they are—evil and good—and concentrate directly and continuously on the eternal, spiritual work of preparing a holy people.

The aspect of riches, into which he goes next, is the other side of the same picture. The natural desire and tendency is to accumulate money and possessions, for various real and supposed motives of "taking care of their own" or doing great and spectacular things for the Truth.

This, if we are not very careful, leads again to confusing gain with godliness.

God's work is primarily with the poor, and He chooses weak and poor instruments for the purpose that the glory may be of God and not of man. He sends the 30,000 home, that the 300 with Gideon may manifest THEIR faith and HIS glory in victory.

We must keep bringing ourselves back to this—the simple, personal work of each individual, day after day—not the great well-financed and well-organized schemes.

The Truth is a very simple, individual, personal thing—passed on in joyful zeal from person to person—radiated in personal example, personal dedication, personal holiness.

Look at the example of Christ. Look at the example of Paul. This was the living power that swept the Roman Empire in the early centuries, and this is the work we have to carry forward—each individual one of us, in this our brief day. "O Timothy" and the exhortation is for all—

> *"Keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called."*

—of which there is sadly so much today, in the Body as well as outside.

I Am Ready to Be Offered

"The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves" (2 Tim. 2:24-25).

Paul's second letter to Timothy was written to strengthen and encourage him. Paul was a prisoner in Rome, about to be put to death for his service to Christ. Timothy was laboring in the Truth at some distant place. Paul appears to fear that Timothy was somewhat disheartened. Truly there was much to cause discouragement. Things were not going well with the Truth. They never have and never will. This the day of small things—of trial and probation and darkness and faith.

In reading the epistles we are impressed with how *personal* and *individual* a thing early Christianity was. It hung to a large extent on the shoulders of *this one man* and the few who were willing to give their lives to help him. Writing to the Philippians (also from prison) he said (Phil. 2: 19-20)—

> *"I trust in the Lord to send Timothy shortly unto you. I have no man likeminded who will naturally care for your state, for ALL SEEK THEIR OWN—not the things that are Christ's*

All were wrapped up in their own little lives and affairs, too busy to accept the honor and glory of a part in the most wonderful and history-making endeavor that the world has ever seen. What is left now of the things they thought so important?

But Timothy—though he early chose the one thing which was needful and held fast to it to the end—could get discouraged too. And though writing to encourage him, the external picture that Paul gives is not a happy one. His comfort did not rest or depend on *temporary* and *external* conditions, but on the immovable facts of the external purpose. In 1:15 he says,

> *"This thou knowest, that all they which are in Asia be turned away from me."*

And in 4:10—

> *"Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world."*

And verse 16—

> *"At my first answer, no one stood with me, but all forsook me."*

Timothy would wonder if there were any point in trying to maintain and hold together an organized body of believers—in trying to carry on ecclesial arrangements. Here was Paul, the

very heart of the movement, a prisoner facing execution, and the body of so-called Christians he had gotten together had almost completely deserted him.

How pathetically he mentions Onesiphorus—one, at least, who sought him out in his imprisonment and was not ashamed of his chains. What a state of affairs—when one brother stands out for grateful commendation for not having been ashamed of association with the apostle in his hour of humiliation and trial! But Paul relates these things without any bitterness or despair. He knows *God's purpose* cannot fail. He says (2:19)—

> *"The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal: THE LORD KNOWETH THEM THAT ARE HIS."*

Men may waver back and forth, but *the foundation standeth sure; and all who will may stand by it—be they many or few.* Paul's concern was to keep the foundation before the eyes of men, regardless of the appearances or conditions in the external Christian body all around him. He urges Timothy (1:6) to—

> *"Stir up the gift of God which is in thee."*

Not that we are to infer that Timothy was negligent, but all need the exhortation to patient and sustained spiritual activity. Paul knew he would soon be gone, and the younger man who had worked with him and depended on him would be facing ecclesial problems alone. He was writing to Timothy of the greatness and surety of the divine purpose, the vast power that controls all and shapes all things to the divine end, the love and joy that casts out all fear—

> *"For God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of POWER and of LOVE, and of a SOUND MIND"* (2 Tim. 1:7).

Power, and love, and a sound mind. This is the spirit that God gives us. All the power was on Paul's side. And so he counsels with cheerful assurance, though forsaken and in prison and facing death. In the next chapter he says (2:9)—

> *"I am in bonds, but the WORD OF GOD IS NOT BOUND!"*

So he exhorts Timothy (1:8)—

> *"Be not ashamed, therefore, to testify to the Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but take your share of suffering for the Gospel in the power of God."*

"I am not ashamed," he says. He was not ashamed or afraid to meet scorn and ridicule and peril for the sake of the Truth. *Why* was he not when others were? Was he naturally any different from them? No, his secret was, as he says (1:12)—

"I am not ashamed, BECAUSE I KNOW Whom I have believed!"

He *KNEW* God. He did not just know *about* Him. He knew Him by close, personal acquaintance. Such knowledge does not come overnight. It takes time. The intimate companionship of God is not for every light and casual seeker. Solomon says—

"When thou vowest, defer not to pay it; GOD HATH NO PLEASURE IN FOOLS" (Ecc. 5:4).

This seems a "hard saying," but it conveys an important principle of divine wisdom. Getting to know God must be taken seriously, and must be made the center of life's purpose. And we must be prepared to wait in patience, though the vision seem to tarry long. Can God be expected to open Himself to one whose heart is not firmly set on developing the acquaintance into permanent devoted affection? *"God hath no pleasure in fools"*—thoughtless, shallow-minded people who are divided in their interests. Paul *knew* Him, and therefore could say—

"NONE OF THESE THINGS MOVE ME."

What triumphant peace of mind! Paul was not above human feelings. He had simply availed himself of something that was far mightier—the God-given spirit of "power and love and of a sound mind." He said to the Corinthians that he was "perplexed, but not in despair." In the present darkness perplexity cannot be avoided. It is part of the training. But it need not, and *must not,* lead to despair.

In verse 13 he exhorts Timothy to *"Hold fast the form of sound words."* This principle runs throughout this epistle. In 2:15 it is—

"Study to show thyself approved with God—rightly dividing the Word of Truth."

But *how?* When we contemplate the endless multitude of theories developed on the supposed basis of the Word of God, we wonder how we should go about avoiding similar pitfalls. But actually it is not the problem that it may appear. The Truth is simple. It is adjusted to our mental capacity. As long as we hold fast to its simple elements, we are safe. And it has largely to do with our *way of life.* Jesus said (John 7:17)—

"If any man will DO God's will, he shall know of the doctrine."

Truly much of Scripture requires study, but there is plenty that is *very clear* and of *practical* bearing on our lives, and if we do *this* part then—and only then—will we know the other. As

guidance in this respect, Paul (in ch. 2) warns against three dangers—

"Strive not about words" (v. 14).

"Shun profane and vain babblings" (v. 16).

"Avoid foolish and unlearned questions" (v. 23).

One thing it will do us good to remember—it is much easier and more flesh-pleasing to *dream and speculate* than to *study and learn.* Imagination has timeless wings, but solid learning is slow, and plodding, and against the grain, especially scriptural learning. Let us briefly consider Paul's three points.

1. *"Strive not about words."* Words are just tools. Much strife has been caused by attaching different meanings to a word. Our contact with the mind of the Spirit is through the recorded words of Scripture, so let us study to get the true meaning of those words, and to use them properly. Let us never *think* we know the meaning of a word until we have looked it up and have checked its use through Scripture. Words as they are commonly and locally used are often very inaccurate. The greatest pitfall is *thinking we know,* without making the effort to really find out. The Word of God is the only true education there is, but it is not something we can peck at. To get anywhere we must, as Paul told Timothy, give ourselves "*wholly* to it."

2. *"Shun profane and vain babblings."* On the face of it we thoughtlessly assume that that never applies to us. But the real meaning is just empty, human talking—that is, the natural expressing of natural thought. The natural mind is foolish in God's sight. Man can learn and observe facts, and modern man has made great strides in applying learned facts to modern inventions. In spiritual realms he must learn and stick to the facts—the revealed facts—he is lost if he begins to speculate on what is not revealed.

3. *"Foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they gender strifes."* There are many unanswered questions in the Bible, and they are often bandied profitlessly back and forth, while the practical meat of divine instruction is overlooked. *The real teaching of Christ bears down hard on the flesh, so naturally the flesh prefers to turn its attention to side issues which do not relate to the way of life.*

But when *we* read the Scriptures, let us try to keep our attention on the heart of the flesh-mortifying teaching, and not allow it to deceitfully expend itself on the incidental scenery, for the heart of man is "deceitful above all things." Let us

concentrate on the *practical* aspects—the holiness, the service to God and others, the self-denial, the kindness and meekness, the purification, the eschewing of earthly treasures and pleasures, the faith and fearless allegiance to Jesus, the humble, lowly way of life—

> *"The servant of the Lord must not STRIVE, but must be gentle toward everyone"* (2:24).

The word used here means "fight" or "quarrel" and is never scripturally used in a good sense. (Five other words are also translated "strive"). If we can accomplish this basic attitude, then we have the groundwork for the gradual bringing unto perfection of the fruit of the Spirit. But *it must go deep.* The natural, evil, irritable, human tendency to quarrel must be completely dissolved away by the mind of the Spirit, not just side-tracked into other channels by being given a spiritual veneer. The servant of the Lord *must not* strive, fight, or quarrel, but must be calm, patient, and gentle toward *all.*

> *"In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves, if GOD peradventure will give them repentance"* (v. 25).

If we can bring ourselves to realize that *all* things are at *all* times in the unerring and almighty hand of God, and that we are each but a small cog in a vast machine, we shall not be trapped into that self-important anxiety that leads to hastiness and harshness. When we see worldliness, and unclean, debasing habits gaining ground in an ecclesia; when we see modern customs and fashions making a mockery of scriptural ordinances; when we see some we have loved and labored with drifting away into looser groups that have the appeal of numbers; when we see attendances gradually diminishing and worldly things interfering even on Sunday mornings, we are apt to become despondent and panicky. But why should we? *Did Paul? NO!*

> *"The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal: THE LORD KNOWETH THEM THAT ARE HIS" (2 Tim. 2:19).*

And the apostle, far from despondency, sounded out from his prison-cell inspiring words of courage, and patience, and glorious hope. Without bitterness, *but with terrible significance,* he points out to Timothy (2:20), that in a great house there are not only vessels of *honor,* but also vessels of *dishonor.* If a man will purify himself, he shall be among the vessels of honor, he says. This may seem a strange way to give encouragement, but it would help Timothy to realize that *ecclesial*

disappointments and difficulties do not necessarily mean an abandonment by God, but are rather a part of the divine wisdom of probation.

If things were so in Paul's day, what are we to expect at the time of the end—the "perilous times" of the "last days" of which he speaks in the beginning of chapter 3? In the list of evils that will particularly mark the latter days, the three he puts first are instructive.

Surely we can assume that the first ones he mentions are outstanding, either as the most serious, the most dangerous, or the most fundamental—*"covetous, boasters, proud."*

Surely, above all, these are days of covetousness, boasting, and pride in this world's goods, even among those naming the name of Christ. And being human we are all too easily drawn into this same vicious net unless we are consciously on guard. Covetousness is something that we always regard as *applying to others.* In ourselves we see it as just an "intelligent appreciation of finer things and a commendable industriousness to acquire them." Let us turn the searching beam of the Spirit on this foolishness. It was someone far wiser than we who said—

> *"Having food and raiment, therewith be content . . . Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also . . . Verily they HAVE THEIR reward"* (1 Tim. 6:8; Luke 12:34; Matt. 6:2).

Among the characteristics of the latter days is (v. 5)—

> *"Having a FORM of godliness, but denying the POWER thereof."*

"Denying the power thereof." Saying it cannot be done—it is not "reasonable" to expect the beauty of holiness in mortal flesh. What *is* "the power thereof"? Let us consider a few verses in which this power is referred to.

> *"The exceeding greatness of His power to usward, according to the working of His mighty power"* (Eph. 1:19).
>
> *"Now unto Him Who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to THE POWER THAT WORKETH IN US"* (Eph. 3:20).
>
> *"My brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might"* (Eph. 6:10).
>
> *"Strengthened with all might according to His glorious power, unto ALL PATIENCE AND LONGSUFFERING WITH JOYFULNESS"* (Col. 1:11).

Is there such a thing as being "strengthened with all might according to His glorious power, unto all patience and

longsuffering with joyfulness?" Let *us*, at least, not be among those who "deny the power thereof." There is such a power, and making contact with it through the Word is vitally important in the way of life. It *can* and *must* be done.

> *"All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution"* (v. 12).

"Persecution" does not necessarily mean bodily peril. But the Scriptures lay down the principles that if we live faithfully and consistently according to the commands of Christ, we shall be treated in an unfriendly manner by the world in general. It is not something we should invite, and *quite often it is our fleshliness and incourtesy—rather than our Christlikeness*—that creates unpleasantness which we may be inclined to interpret as persecution for righteousness' sake. There is much that is self-condoned (and even self-glorified!) as "righteous anger" which is really but an ugly giving vent to the evil of the flesh.

But still the fact remains that "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." If we openly advocate and try to live up to the principles of Christ, we shall annoy most people because they *do not want to live that way and they resent the inference that they should.* You are an "extremist," you are too "narrow-minded," you are "righteous overmuch." Until we recognize and completely accept this state of affairs, we shall be unhappy and divided in our minds. We can have no friendship with the world or with worldly " brethren" if we are an out-and-out, unconcealed follower of Christ. They may tolerate us, but they cannot like us, for they will be uneasy in our presence, and we in theirs. Everything that is not of the Father is of the world. Therefore, the world can even be among our own selves.

There can be no true communion in the Spirit except between those few who are hungering and thirsting for righteousness—anxious and striving to get closer and closer to God and the divine way of life.

> *"Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and been assured of . . . from a child thou hast known the holy Scriptures which are able to make thee wise unto salvation"* (v. 14).

How are they able to make us "wise unto salvation?" Paul continues—

> *"All Scripture is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction IN RIGHTEOUSNESS, that the*

man of God may be perfect, throughly (that is, completely) *furnished unto all good works."*

This is a very common quotation among us, but have we ever stopped to analyze it and to note what the Scriptures are designed to *do to us?*—what it *means* to be "wise unto salvation"?

"Reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be PERFECT and COMPLETELY EQUIPPED."

Do we realize the tremendous, vital power that lies between the covers of this Book? If we come to it hungering and thirsting after righteousness, we *shall* find it. It is a promise. It is a divine guarantee. It may be in a far different way than we expect, and there may be long waiting and darkness, but it *will come*—a marvelous, divine, transforming power of godliness.

Our part is to hold fast, keep at it. On one occasion Daniel, the greatly beloved, mourned and fasted and prayed for three weeks continuously before receiving any recognition. Moses had to afflict himself forty days before being received up to the mount of God. And these are but *symbolic* periods of waiting. Anna, the prophetess, waited eighty-four years as a widow in the Temple, serving God night and day with fasting and prayer—waiting to see the salvation of the Lord.

"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine" (v. 4:3).

We know that the whole vast body of so-called Christendom has long since reached this state. They cannot bear to listen to sound teaching, for it interferes with their way of life. This is the biggest stumbling-block to acceptance of the Truth. The lesson for us is to *be sure that we are not among the number who are annoyed and resentful when the call to ever-increasing godliness is presented.* We dare not regard it as a burden. That was wherein Israel grievously offended God. "The *burden* of the Lord." Can it be a *burden* that God asks us to draw closer and closer to Him and His way? We must hunger and thirst after righteousness—we must perceive its divine beauty and value, and the repulsive, deadly ugliness of the natural fleshly mind.

"I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand" (4:6).

Paul had come to the end of his course, apart from the Master himself no man had given more, or suffered more, for the Household of Faith. One would expect that as the great apostle to the Gentiles went to his death for the Truth, the whole

brotherhood would surround him in love and sorrow. *But just the opposite was the case—*

> *"All Asia* (the heart of his labors) *be turned away from me."*

And when he stood before the Roman bar, his life at stake—

> *"No man stood with me—all forsook me."*

Twice the aged apostle says to Timothy in this last chapter—

> *"Do your best to come to me soon."*

The reason he gives is—

> *"For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world."*

Demas was at one time a close fellow-laborer with Paul, and joins lovingly with him in greetings in two former epistles. But apparently he had never truly grasped the real value and beauty of the Truth; never had its divine transforming power sink into his heart. There is no indication that Demas had necessarily openly "left the Truth," as the saying goes. He had just come to "love the world" and had left Paul.

The falling-away of the once-earnest Demas is the saddest part of the whole epistle—far sadder than the lonely, forsaken position of Paul himself. The sadness is that for Demas the picture had faded. He had once shared with Paul bright visions of eternal joy in Christ, but now he "loved this present world."

Why? Surely we would expect the vision of the future to grow brighter as one continued in the Truth. It *does*—if we are ever striving to get closer to God. But if we regard being in the Truth as an end in itself—an accomplished thing that just requires routine maintenance—then the vital, living reality of it will gradually, imperceptibly, fade from our minds. For we are so constituted. We get used to things—and their effect on us diminishes. Consider Israel and the marvelous, divine pillar of fire that became so commonplace to them. We cannot maintain an interest and an enthusiasm unless we are *striving for something.* Paul said to the Philippians (3:13-14)—

> *"Brethren, I do not count myself yet to have laid hold, but one thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind and stretching forward to those things which are before, I press on toward the goal unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."*

He did not consider that he had attained. He could see that *all the time that remained to him had to be accounted for by a continual movement toward the ideal in Christ.* Not a mechanical approach—just a "doing" or "not doing"—but as he says, that he might better apprehend, or *comprehend;* that is, a

continuous mental drawing closer to the ideal. Let us note that this man says in the same Philippian epistle—

"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

"I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content."

"I have suffered the loss of all things and do count them but dung that I may win Christ."

But *still* he could at the same time say: "I have *not attained,* I have *further to go.* I *stretch forward* to the mark of the high calling." That is the beauty and glory and power of the mark of the high calling in Christ Jesus—its unattainable but ever-inspiring perfection of godliness.

This was the secret that kept Paul's zeal on tiptoe—counting each moment an opportunity to improve his offering, to draw closer to God, to intensify the joy of divine fellowship—eagerly spending the time in loving preparation, always adding by anticipation to the pleasure of the final perfect, endless communion.

And when the time of his departure came, he said,

"I have fought a good fight."

It *was* a fight. It still *is* a fight—a bitter, yet glorious battle. A battle whose weapons are kindness, and patience, and gentleness, and endless self-searching, and hope in the darkness, and an enduring, unquestioning faith. BUT—

"He that overcometh shall inherit all things."

I Will Return to My First Husband

"I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her . . . and I will give her the Valley of Trouble for a Door of Hope" (Hos. 2:14-15).

The book of the prophet Hosea is one of the most beautiful and powerful of the prophetic books. Hosea is the prophet of the love of God, the gentlest and tenderest of the prophets—the John of the Old Testament. He speaks of the truest, and most patient, and deepest of loves in the face of the greatest of unfaithfulnesses.

He prophesied during the closing years of Israel's kingdom, just as Jeremiah and Ezekiel did later for the kingdom of Judah.

Like them—only in an even deeper and more intimate way—he enacted in his own life the sorrow and tragedy of his people.

To Jeremiah, God said, in Judah's last days—

> *"Thou shalt not take thee a wife, neither shalt thou have sons or daughters in this place . . ."*
>
> *"For I have taken away My peace from this people, saith the Lord, even loving kindness and mercies"* (Jer. 16:1-5).

Ezekiel's prophetic burden was more terrible than this. God said to him—

> *"Son of man, behold, I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke: yet neither shalt thou mourn nor weep, neither shalt thy tears run down . . . forbear to cry; make no mourning for the dead."*

And Ezekiel says—

> *"At even my wife died, and I did in the morning as I was commanded"* (Eze. 24:16-18).

But Hosea's task was yet more difficult, more personal, and more prolonged. He was commanded—as a testimony of God's great, unmerited goodness and love to Israel—to love, and marry, and nourish and protect, a faithless and licentious woman, who should abandon him but who should eventually, after long patience and kindness, be reconciled to him in faithfulness and truth.

* * *

Hosea prophesied during the reigns of Jeroboam II of Israel, and Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah of Judah.

Jeroboam II was the second last of Jehu's line, to whom God had promised four generations. Jeroboam's son Zechariah, who followed him, was murdered after a six-months' reign.

Hosea's period of ministry was about forty years—the last forty years of the northern ten-tribed Kingdom of Israel, just as Jeremiah prophesied during the last, sad forty years of the Kingdom of Judah.

Hosea began his prophecy in a time of prosperity for Israel. The land had been in great distress before Jeroboam began his reign, but God in His pity for the sad condition of Israel, even though they were wicked, greatly strengthened and helped Jeroboam and enabled him to recover Israel's lost territory and defeat her enemies and even extend his rule over Syria to the north.

It was one more opportunity for Israel to recognize and appreciate God's goodness and love, and the wisdom of drawing nigh unto Him in faithfulness.

But Israel did not respond. Because of their apparent strength and stability, they could not believe the end was so near. In spite of God's help, they and their king intensified their wickedness and idolatry. *God often blesses, as a last invitation to repentance and reform, before pouring out His judgments on sin.*

* * *

Such was the background of Hosea's prophecy, as the powerful but evil reign of Jeroboam II drew to its close. Israel did not realize it, but this reign was to mark the end of any real security or stability for the nation. In the remaining twenty-five years of the Kingdom, six kings were to rise and fall, and the dark shadow of Assyria, to whom they had first turned as an ally, was to grow swiftly and terribly until it completely destroyed and blotted out their nation, and carried them away.

Israel had looked to Assyria as a friend and helper, but worldly alliances are always disastrous in the end.

* * *

Hosea begins his prophecy—

> *"Yet a little while, and I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu, and I will cause to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel"* (1:4).

Hosea's message sheds much light on the relationship between God's love for His people and their necessary chastening and disciplining.

While it manifests the great beauty and the transforming, appealing power of His infinite patience and affection, it clearly speaks in the strongest terms of the sorrows and bitternesses and hardships that must inevitably arise from disobedience and wickedness.

Its basic message is the great tragedy of Israel's blindness and unnecessary, self-caused miseries in the face of God's choice of them as the special recipients of His love—a choice not as a matter of respect of persons, but as a witness and example to all the world of the beauties of His character and the glories of His purpose.

Even in judgment, its tone is sorrow rather than anger, and the severest condemnations always look forward to eventual reconciliation.

* * *

The book of Hosea contains many deep lessons on the subject of marriage and divorce—deep spiritual principles of patience and kindness and hope, and faithfulness, and a love that bears and endures all things, and never fails.

The beautiful story of Hosea impresses us more than anything else could with the great depth of meaning in the words of Jesus to the Pharisees—

> *"Because of the hardness of your hearts, Moses suffered you to put away your wives."*

"Because of the hardness of your hearts"—because of your pettiness, your carnalness, your fleshliness, your smallness of mind and heart, your obsession with your own comfort and satisfaction and pleasure, your inability to comprehend the true beauty and meaning of unselfish love and sacrifice—the true meaning and purpose of life—

> *"He that hateth*—disregardeth—*his life for my sake shall keep it unto life eternal."*

Consider the lives of Hosea, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and others — living tragedies enacted for the manifestation of God's goodness and the bringing of many sons to glory.

These things teach us that our lives mean nothing except as they fit into the purpose of God, and contribute to that purpose. The lives of these faithful men of God were not tragedies when seen in light of their glorious eternal consummation, and the comfort and instruction and benefit they have brought to others.

Much more than we realize, our reasoning on many things is based on the hardness of our hearts. Let us let our minds dwell

on this story of Hosea, which so wonderfully illustrates the divine wisdom of love and self-sacrifice and infinite forbearance, which to the mind of the flesh is foolishness.

In the great sweep of the divine purpose with mankind, our own petty little passing circumstances do not have a fraction of the importance that we in our self-centeredness attach to them.

All that matters in the few brief troubled days of our pilgrimage is the glory of God and the advancement of His gracious plan of eternal salvation for those that love Him.

Let us constantly, joyfully thank God we are permitted to play a part in that glorious plan. Nothing else has any importance.

* * *

"The beginning of the Word of the Lord by Hosea. And the Lord said to Hosea"—

"Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms, for the land hath committed great whoredom, departing from the Lord" (Hos. 1:2).

And she bore him a son, and the Lord said (v. 4)—

"Call his name Jezreel, for yet a little while and I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu, and will cause to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel."

"And I will break the bow in the valley of Jezreel."

Jezreel is one of the fortresses commanding the valley of Megiddo, or Esdraelon. It is on the slopes of Mt. Gilboa, where Saul died, and it controls the gateway between the mountains down to the Jordan valley, the main entrance to Israel from the east. This is Israel's historic battleground, right back to the days of Gideon.

The "blood of Jezreel" that was soon to be avenged began with the treacherous murder of the faithful Naboth by Jezebel.

Jehu was raised up to destroy the house of Ahab for this wickedness, which he did at Jezreel, but because of his own subsequent wickedness and following in the ways of Ahab, all the bloodshed associated with Jezreel is held against him and his house, including his killing of Ahab's family.

Jehu had boasted, "Come and see my zeal for the Lord." He manifested a great zeal for vengeance and destruction, and condemnation of others, but such a zeal—if it is not accompanied by righteousness and gentleness and mercy and tenderness toward the weaknesses of others—is merely an ugly, hypocritical, Pharisaical manifestation of the evil of the flesh.

Jezreel has a double meaning, which comprehends both Israel's judgment and her redemption. Basically it means, *"God will sow."* It is the name of God combined with the root word related to seed, planting, and conception—both animal and vegetable. It also comprehends the meaning of the *"seed or offspring of God"*—the Fatherhood of God—the family relationship. "We also are His offspring," as Paul told the Athenians—both naturally, and also potentially in a spiritual sense, as John expresses it—

"Beloved, now are we the sons of God."

Jezreel also means *"God will scatter"*—as seed is scattered, but with the idea of an eventual reaping and gathering—

"He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him as a shepherd doth his flock." (Jer. 31:10).

Hosea's own name means "Savior" or "Salvation"—another form of Joshua or Jesus. He typifies God in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself. His life story is an exemplification of Paul's words concerning Christ (Eph. 5:25-27)—

"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the ecclesia, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word."

"That he might present it to himself a glorious ecclesia, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should BE HOLY AND WITHOUT BLEMISH."

Hosea portrays the glorious truth expressed by Paul to the Romans (5:8)—

"God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

* * *

"And she conceived again, and bore a daughter. And God said unto him,"

"Call her name Lo-Ruhamah—('Not having obtained mercy')—for I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel."

"And she bore a son. Then said God, Call his name Lo-Ammi—('Not My people')— for ye are not My people, and I will not be your God" (vs. 6-9).

And so the basis of the allegory is laid in Hosea's wife and three children. The three names represent three successively increasing stages of divine abandonment—Jezreel, Lo-Ruhamah, Lo-Ammi—Scattered, Unloved, Rejected.

In spite of these pronouncements from God, so strikingly manifested to Israel in Hosea's own life, the chapter immediately continues (v. 10)—

"Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered;"

"And it shall come to pass that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are NOT My people, there shall it be said unto them, Ye ARE the sons of the living God."

"Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together, and appoint themselves one head, and they shall come up out of the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel"

"GREAT SHALL BE THE DAY OF JEZREEL"—Great shall be the day of the Seed of God—

"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will sow the house of Israel and house of Judah with the seed of man, and with the seed of beast . . ."

"As I have watched over them to destroy, so will I watch over them to plant, saith the Lord" (Jer. 31:27).

* * *

Chapter two repeats the same theme, with different figures and details, ending with the same assurance and promise.

While chapter one was based mainly on Hosea's children and their names, chapter two, under the allegory of his unfaithful wife, is a representation of God's infinite patience and love and kindness toward Israel, and their repeated unfaithfulness and corruption. The lesson is for us, for we continually fail and are so often unfaithful to the beautiful character of godliness—

"Plead with your mother, plead: for she is not my wife, neither am I her husband . . ."

"For she said, I will go after my lovers, that give me my bread and my water, my wool, my flax, mine oil, and my drink . . ."

"For she did not know that I gave her her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold" (vs. 2-8).

She attributed her prosperity to her own efforts, and her intimacies with foreigners.

All that she had, all that she could ever have, even her life itself, and her every breath, was of the love and mercy of God —but she did not know. Hosea says later—

"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge."

—Lack of the knowledge of God—lack of a realization of the universality of His love and goodness. Paul emphasizes this point to the Lycaonians—

> *"God left not Himself without witness, in that He did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness"* (Acts 14:17).

We take so much for granted, when we should be continually awed by God's goodness. We attribute so much to other causes, to our own efforts and accomplishments, when we should be in constant humble recognition that we of ourselves can DO nothing and ARE nothing, and ALL good is of God.

> *"She shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them: she shall seek them, but not find them . . . Then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband, for then was it better with me than now"* (2:7).

Here is the patience and longsuffering of God—waiting till she learns by bitter experience that there is no good but in Him.

This is a divine characteristic to be marveled at in thankfulness, but not to be presumed upon. Paul says in warning—

> *"DESPISEST thou the riches of His goodness and forbearance and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to REPENTANCE?"* (Rom. 2:4)

But still there must be divine longsuffering and patience in infinite measure, or none at all could be saved. This is the beautiful lesson of Hosea's personal allegory.

And this is the great lesson of the book for us—the lesson of the unmerciful debtor—the lesson that we have been given so much unmerited blessing that we should be eager and anxious to give all we can on our part—that we have been forgiven so much that patience and mercy and love and longsuffering should be our joyful manifestation of thanksgiving toward God and desire to expand our hearts and minds and be like Him in the limitless pouring forth of goodness.

How small and cramped and ugly is the natural mind of the flesh! How vast and glorious and beautiful is the mind of the Spirit!

Any impatience, or bitterness, or unkindness, or condemnation of others, put us into the position of the evil, small-minded unmerciful debtor who was graciously forgiven a fortune but who without mercy extorted a few pence from his unfortunate neighbor.

Jesus' comment on the punishment of this evil man was—

"So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also to you if ye from your hearts—FROM YOUR HEARTS—forgive not every one his brother their trespasses."

It was from Hosea that Jesus drew those memorable words to the self-righteous, hypocritical Pharisees—

"Go thou and learn what this meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice."

The greatest of personal sacrifice is repulsive to God if it is in self-glory and harshness, and not in the spirit of humbleness and mercy and tenderness and an expanding love toward all mankind.

* * *

But in spite of God's great love for His people, they must go through a long and terrible night of suffering for their foolishness and sins.

Vs. 9-13 of chapter two describe Israel's Lo-Ammi period—"Not My people"—cast off, rejected, scattered and afflicted. *No people has suffered like this people*—the chosen and beloved of God.

Then vs. 14 to the end describe, in pictures of great beauty, the various aspect of the ultimate victory and triumph of God's ever patient love for His people, as typified by Hosea—

"Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her" (2:14).

Once again God will deliver His people from Egyptian darkness and bondage. Once again will He take them apart to Himself in the wilderness, and renew the covenant, and prepare them for the possession of the land.

"And I will give her the valley of Achor for a door of hope" (v. 15).

Here is summed up the whole theme of the prophecy — The valley of Achor—the Valley of "Trouble"—shall become a Door of HOPE.

All that they have passed through will be found to be the loving provision of God to lead them into hope.

"And she shall sing there as in the days of her youth."

The Song of Solomon is the song of the Bridegroom and the Bride. The Song of Moses and the Lamb, the great Song of the Redeemed, will be an antitype and memorial of when Israel sang in their joy of deliverance on the shores of the Red Sea.

"At that day thou shalt call Me Ishi—('My Husband')—and not Baali—('My Lord')."

Here is a change of relationship.

Jesus said to his disciples, at the last supper—

"Henceforth I call you not SERVANTS, but I have called you FRIENDS."

Paul expresses the same thought in describing to the Galatians the glorious new relationship that the redeemed bear to God through Christ—

"We WERE in BONDAGE under the elements of the world, but God sent forth His Son to redeem them that were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption of SONS."

"Wherefore thou art no more a SERVANT, but a SON."

In his enacted allegory, as we read in chapter three, Hosea, at God's instruction buys back to him his wife who had abandoned him and had sunk to the miserable position of a bond-slave, just as Israel had abandoned God and sold themselves into slavery by their sins.

"And in that day I will make a covenant for them with the beast of the field, and with the fowls of heaven."

"And I will break the bow and the sword and the battle out of the earth" (v. 18).

Here are the glories of the millennium so greatly needed today—peace and harmony among all mankind, and among the whole animal creation.

"And I will betroth thee unto Me FOREVER, in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving kindness, and mercy, and faithfulness" (vs. 19-20).

All things shall be made new again. All the estrangement of the past shall be forgotten in the final glorious reconciliation.

"I will hear, saith the Lord, I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth, and the earth shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil, and they shall hear Jezreel" (vs. 21-22).

The curse shall be removed, the long silence of rejection and estrangement broken, and all nature shall be in tune and in intimate, harmonious communion together, and eagerly responsive to Jezreel—the redeemed Seed of God.

"And I will sow her unto Me in the earth" (v. 23).

She shall be the blessed and honored means whereby the whole earth shall bring forth the fruits of righteousness unto the glory of God—

"And I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy, and I will say to them that were not my people, Thou art My people; and they shall say, Thou art my God."

These first three chapters conclude the personal allegory of Hosea. Chapters four to fourteen are the more literal and detailed application to the nation of Israel— their sins, the judgments to come upon them, and the ultimate reconciliation.

In chapter thirteen the prophet climaxes his message. After speaking of their long desolation by the four savage beasts of the Gentiles—the lion, the bear, the leopard and the unnamed wild beast (vs. 7-8)—he continues, in v. 14, with the wonderful prophecy with which Paul similarly climaxes his resurrection chapter, 1st Cor. 15—

> *"I will ransom them from the power of the grave: I will redeem them from death."*
>
> *"O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction."*

Paul's application of this to the transformation of the faithful in Christ from mortality to immortality gives it a far deeper significance than just the political resurrection of Israel to which it primarily applies.

We are taught by this, as we are so often taught elsewhere, that as Hosea was an allegory to Israel, so Israel is an allegory to us.

Therein lies the great significance of the final words of the prophecy—

> *"Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? Prudent, and he shall know them?"* (14:9).

Who IS wise?

God said sadly through Hosea—

> *"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge"* (4:6).

How much *do* we *care* about knowing these things? How much real, sincere *effort* have we put in this past week to learn and understand the lessons of God's Word through which we have been passing in our daily readings? To what extent have we meditated upon it and prayed for understanding?

Let us face these questions honestly. Are we truly ANXIOUS and concerned to learn more and more about God and His Word?

It is so easy to just go through the motions and think we are in the Truth, without ever having *the real love of and yearning toward the knowledge of God which is essential to salvation.* This is what marks off the true disciple from the common run of mankind.

These divine words are *life.* They are essential meat and drink. In them alone is the power of love and of holiness and godliness and of overcoming the flesh.

"*WHO IS WISE:* AND HE *SHALL* UNDERSTAND THESE THINGS?"

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