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Preface

Glory and beauty characterize everything pertaining to God, and we must get in harmony with the glory and beauty of God, for literally we are ugly; sin is ugly, the flesh is ugly; human nature is ugly.

Moses' face shone with the glory of God, for when he came down from the revelation of these things he had to cover his face, for Israel could not look upon him.

Paul tells us that this symbolizes their groveling, earthly blindness; that true believers see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ; that they grow daily more like Him from glory to glory. Glory means excellence and excellence means betterness.

We are changed into the same image from glory to glory, from betterness to betterness, closer and closer to the divine ideal, to the perfect beauty of character, spirituality, divinity, godliness.

The whole purpose of our lives is to increase in glory and in beauty, in excellence, in holiness, in godliness, in beauty of character, in fulness of love, in depth of understanding. If this does not occur, we live in vain.

Solomon declares—*God has made everything beautiful in His time*" (Ecc. 3:11).

Only beauty, true beauty, is eternal. All else must pass away. The very existence of beauty, the basic beauty of all God's works from the smallest to the greatest is one of the greatest arguments for divinity and is against the theory of evolution. Evolution is blind, earthly, grubby, carnal. It has no place or explanation for beauty and for glory.

* * *

We must be careful that our faith is not a spare time, easy-going compliance grounded on flesh with its roots in our own desires and inclinations . . . just a pleasant religious hobby. What happens in a time of trial to a shallow faith based on personal convenience and vague emotion? The parable of the seed tells us plainly enough. It is a fair-weather faith. It has no staying power. It gives no strength or comfort in time of need. The glare of the sun scorches and withers it because *it never took the trouble to develop roots*.

It is all on the *surface*. We know what is represented by the *roots*. It means the knowledge, the perception, the grasp and

insight and stability that is the result of constant study and application. We may deceive ourselves for a while and have no feeling of need for effort in this direction, but *there comes a time to each brother and sister when the roots are tried to the limit of their strength, with disastrous results to those which have been neglected.*

* * *

To the real children of God, those few whom He will acknowledge in the end, the Truth is their whole life daily, hourly, constantly; they always abound in the work of the Lord; their heart is always in the Truth and the brotherhood: they grieve when they have to miss any ecclesial activity, knowing that the body needs all its members to be healthy and to function. Let us prayerfully strive to be among the few chosen from the many that are called.

—G. V. Growcott

A number of years have passed since volumes 1, 2 and 3 of “*Be Ye Transformed*” were printed. We are pleased that in the mercy of the Father, this fourth collection of exhortations and expositions from *The Berean Christadelphian Magazine* will help all of us to be strengthened further in our most Holy Faith. This is the most important thing for us to aim for. There is little time left for us to improve ourselves. Time is flying by too quickly for us to be caught unaware of what is necessary for our salvation.

The above three quotations from bro. Growcott’s writings in this fourth volume show forth the theme of this book. They contained wonderful thoughts based on the Word of God, as well as exhortations aimed directly at those who are seeking guidance to help them toward the Kingdom of God.

The directness of bro. Growcott’s words is powerful in the Preface above, firstly, strongly advising us to get into harmony with the glory and beauty of God. And then secondly, we must have deep roots in the Truth to withstand the trials that come. And then, thirdly, to impress us to recognize what the whole purpose of our lives must be. We are to be completely devoted to God, as true servants, giving ourselves to the One Cause, the glorious Hope that is ever set before us, the Kingdom of God.

—K. D. Clubb

The Spirit of the Law

THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST IN THE LAW OF MOSES

"Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy Law!" (Psa. 119:18).

We are apt, in shallow thoughtlessness, to look upon the Law of Moses as merely a code of harsh regulation and bondage, and the Law of Christ as a liberal and tolerant message of indulgence and freedom.

This is not the true picture of either, as a consideration of the words of Paul to the Hebrews immediately shows—

"For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward;

"How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord" (Heb. 2:2, 3).

"He that despised Moses' Law died without mercy under two or three witnesses:

"Of how much SORER punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:28-31).

* * *

The emphasis in the Law of Moses is holiness: the emphasis in the Law of Christ is love.

But they are not contradictory opposites: they are rather a harmonious unity of essential parts.

The Law of Moses lays the necessary foundation upon which the Law of Christ is built. It was a schoolmaster to bring mankind to a realization of their sinfulness and helplessness and need. It always pointed forward comfortingly to the divine remedy of mercy and love.

Consider, indeed the very name of the central object of the whole Mosaic system, where God's glory shined, and where He said He would meet with Israel—the MERCY-SEAT, that is, the *Place of Mercy*.

Mercy and forgiveness in love constitute the true inner spirit of the Law. Both Christ himself and his apostles tell us that the whole Mosaic Law was fulfilled in one word, "Love."

Love, then MUST be its basic principle. Every one of the endless, countless sacrifices of the Law was a testimony, not only

of sin and failure and punishment and death, but infinitely more so of mercy and forgiveness and hope and life.

The requirements of holiness, the great message of the Law, have not been relaxed. Rather they have been infinitely intensified and broadened. Christ carried this principle right back through mere outward act into the deepest and earliest well-springs of the heart and soul and mind—

“Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart” (Matt. 5:28).

“Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14).

“Be ye PERFECT, even as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matt. 5:48).

The Law of Moses is a judicial code for the regulation of a nation for enforcing order and justice, and punishing crime.

As such, it must be firm. As such, it must require an eye for an eye. It will be the same again in the Kingdom of God: sin will be punished, swiftly, unerringly, appropriately, inexorably.

It is only the utter folly and confusion of man, and his total inability to regulate himself in society, that regards justice and punishment of evil as old-fashioned, and blind, hazy, sentimental indulgence toward crime as progress and “enlightenment.”

* * *

But the law had a much deeper and more beautiful lesson than this for those able to comprehend. It made provision for, and pointed the way to, a beautiful society of mutual, peaceful, self-sacrificing love, if Israel had only ever been able to rise to its glorious sublimity.

It did this by commands whose fulness and depth were limited only by the capacity of the hearer to comprehend and respond. Let us look at some of them.

* * *

“He that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack” (Ex. 16:18).

A marvelous window into the mind and will of God is opened by the Spirit through Paul when he applies this as an allegory of the Body of Christ. He is speaking to the Corinthian brethren about care for one another, sharing freely with others the blessings God has given us, and ministering to one another's needs. All that we have is God's, and is given us, not for our own selfish indulgence, but to be used faithfully in the common good.

In expounding this beautiful principle, he says (2 Cor. 9:6, 7):
*"He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly,
and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bounti-
fully, for God loveth a cheerful giver."*

* * *

*"If thou lend money to any of My people that is poor by
thee, thou shalt not be to him as an usurer, neither shalt
thou lay upon him usury (N.R.V.: interest)" (Ex. 22:25).*

The principle of taking interest on money is a very vicious, evil principle. It is the principle by which the rich get richer and the poor poorer. It is the foundation of the world's evil, fleshly, selfish, grasping economic structure. There is very deep spiritual wisdom in the Law of Moses.

This principle is obscured by our translation. To us, the word "usury" means excessive and oppressive interest. There is no such distinction in the original.

In Nehemiah 5:10, 11, for instance, the term "usury" is applied to interest of one percent per month—well below today's legal limit. Nehemiah condemns it, and urges the exactors to restore it.

In Hebrew, the words for "interest," "buying on credit," and "deception" are all the same basic word.

All this is out of harmony with the mind of Christ, and the Law—if Israel could only have seen it—beautifully reveals that spiritual mind.

* * *

*"If thou take thy neighbor's raiment to pledge, thou shalt
deliver it unto him by that the sun goeth down . . . It shall
come to pass that when he crieth unto Me, I will hear, for
I am gracious" (Ex. 22:26, 27).*

We find that in God's infinite love and wisdom, the Law set up a necessary system of national order and regulation, but by gentle, kindly loopholes, it took away all the real sting and harshness.

If a man were poor, and had to pledge his last garment, it must be given back each night for him to sleep in. Actually, this took all the meaning out of the pledge, and made it more of a nuisance than a security, especially as a creditor, however powerful, was not allowed to go into a man's house to claim a pledge, but must stand outside until it was brought to him. The wise and godly lender would see the point. So must we.

Often, for practicality and the self-respect of others, we must go through certain forms, but we must be very careful that the

restraint is measured and gentle, and does not become oppressive and destructive.

* * *

“If thou meet thine enemy’s ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again. If thou see the ass of him that hateth thee lying under his burden, and wouldest forbear to help him, thou shalt surely help with him” (Ex. 23:4, 5).

This goes as far and as deep as any New Testament teaching. Here is the basic principle of good for evil—loving our enemies. Not just forbearing to retaliate—that is at best a cold, dead, negative virtue: not just piously wishing them well—that is cheap and easy self-satisfaction. But an active, interested, guileless laboring and putting one’s self out to do good to those who are opposed to us and injure us.

The wisdom is that this is the way to reconciliation—to the transformation of enemies into friends—to the overcoming of evil with good. We can never rest as long as there is estrangement.

We must seek for opportunities to do good—to manifest the beauty of the more excellent way of love, and the ox astray or the fallen ass may be a God-provided means of healing a breach, for which we must be constantly on the watch. Sometimes there is nothing we can do but pray, but *let us never underestimate the infinite power of prayer.*

And we must always remember the basic principle of all sound giving—

“God loveth a CHEERFUL GIVER” (2 Cor. 9:7).

The reluctant, or self-righteous, or publicity-conscious, or small-minded, carefully weighed and measured gift is an abomination to God.

* * *

“The seventh year thou shalt let thy land rest and lie still: that the poor of thy people may eat: and what they leave, the beasts of the field shall eat. In like manner thou shalt deal with thy vineyard and thine oliveyard” (Ex. 23:11).

How MUCH Israel could have learned from this!—of Faith, and Promise, and Kindness, and even a foreshadowing of the opening up of the love of God to the Gentiles, for what else can be meant in this special provision for the beasts than the call of the Gentiles to partake of the children’s bread?

One year in seven would not of itself be too great a help, either to the poor or to the beasts, but it should teach a gentle lesson

of consideration that should sweeten and beautify the other six years—just as the Sabbath day devoted exclusively to the things of God was simply a focus and a pivot for bringing the whole life, and every day, and every moment, into a pattern of God-centered holiness.

To skip a year's sowing and reaping (especially if need were pressing and the previous year had not been too productive) would be a tremendous exercise of faith, and more so if others less scrupulous were prospering who were not doing the same.

There is much we can each learn from the Law of Moses.

* * *

"Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring Me an offering: of every man that giveth it WILLINGLY WITH HIS HEART shall ye take My offering" (Ex. 25:2).

We think of the Law as external regulation, but the whole heart and meaning of all obedience and service is the *spirit in which it is done*—

"God loveth a cheerful giver."

The giver himself must be part of the gift. No gift has any meaning unless we give ourselves with it, from the heart—

"Of every man that giveth it WILLINGLY WITH HIS HEART shall ye take My offering."

This wise requirement of the Law changed a cold, legal obligation into a warm and loving personal joy. It drew God and the giver together in mutual affection and fellowship.

Actually, we can give God nothing. All is His already. And we can do nothing for anyone that God Himself could not do for them infinitely better. But God in His wisdom provides scope for the manifestation of the yearnings of the heart and the pouring out of love one to another.

Without this, any gift, any service, any sacrifice, is an abomination in God's sight.

* * *

"Thou shalt make a Mercy-Seat of pure gold. . . There will I meet with thee" (Ex. 25:17, 22).

What glorious significance there is in the name of the object that was the center and apex of the whole Mosaic Law—

"A Mercy-Seat of pure gold."

A "Place of Mercy." Here was where the Shekinah-glory of God's presence dwelt, and before which the High Priest approached in reverence once each year.

Truly it was hidden in the deep recesses of the Tabernacle, far beyond where any ordinary Israelite dare tread. Truly it was

only once a year approached, and only then by one specially-chosen, specially-prepared, specially-equipped man. This befitted the Law's position and purpose and dispensation.

But it was there. All Israel knew it was there. All Israel knew, or could have known and realized, that all the Law, all the elaborate Tabernacle arrangements, pointed inward to the Mercy-Seat of pure gold, the Ark of safety and covenant relationship, the Glory foreshadowing the Redeemed of the Lord—and in, and through, and over all: the marvelous, radiant effulgence of the indwelling presence of God.

* * *

"Thou shalt make an altar" (Ex. 27:1).

The Mercy-Seat of gold was the place of meeting. The Altar of brass was the way of approach. Without the Altar—without provision for repentance, and sacrifice, and cleansing, and forgiveness, and reconciliation—the Law truly would have been a "ministration of condemnation."

But the Altar taught that God had made loving provision for the redemption of fallen man that the Law not only commanded and condemned but, in a type and figure of Christ, healed and strengthened and purified and redeemed.

* * *

"Take from among you an offering. Whosoever is of a willing heart, let him bring it" (Ex. 35:5).

Here again is that same vital principle of willing heartedness. We come back to its consideration because of the aspect of its so significant repetition in this chapter—see also verses 21, 22, 26, 29.

God does not waste words. When He repeats something, He has a purpose. When He repeats something over and over, there is surely an importance and an urgency that we do well to note and ponder on. Constant repetition is the way to deep and abiding memory.

The heart is everything. Where our heart is determines our destiny. God demands the whole heart, given willingly, eagerly, enthusiastically, unreservedly.

* * *

"When ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest. And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard. Thou shalt leave them for the poor and the stranger: I am the Lord" (Lev. 19:9, 10).

Here certainly is carelessness and inefficiency! What conscientious farmer could be comfortable and satisfied in half-doing his work in this slipshod way?

But often inefficiency is really a greater efficiency, and carelessness a deeper and more beautiful form of care. We call to mind the godly Boaz—

“Let fall some handfuls of purpose” (Ruth 2:16).

The whole underlying spirit of the Law is a free, uncalculating, almost reckless liberality—as befits the noble children of a Father of unlimited wealth and benevolence.

God can pour out riches in abundance—cause the barrels of meal never to empty, and the widow’s oil never to run dry.

The purpose of life’s probation is to teach us to be like God—to teach us the inexhaustible abundance of the blessings that God is eager to pour on those who can free themselves from the mental shackles of natural, human, cramped and calculating smallness.

And it was far wiser to leave it in the field for the poor to themselves labor over and slowly gather, than to harvest it all very efficiently; then dole it out on demoralizing breadlines.

* * *

“Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt rebuke thy neighbor, and not suffer sin upon him (R.V.: not bear sin because of him).

“Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge, against the children of thy people: but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Lev. 19:17, 18).

This, Jesus said, is the second greatest commandment—

“Thou shalt love thy neighbor AS THYSELF” (Lev. 19:18).

This, and the love of God, he said, contains all the Law and Prophets. This, then, is the basic spirit of the Law. Here we come to the very heart and core of the matter—that one fundamental thing which it all was designed to teach and foster and gradually develop in the character.

In this connection, the two points specifically mentioned here are significant—

Thou shalt not avenge.

Thou shalt not bear a grudge.

The outward and the inward manifestations of unforgiveness and nursed malice.

The Law of Moses required the strict carrying out of justice, and prompt, proper punishment for crime. But it forbid any spirit of revenge or ill will. We see how the Law, in its deeper

aspects, went beyond the external act and reached into the depths of the heart—

“Thou shalt not hate thy brother IN THY HEART. Thou shalt in anywise rebuke thy neighbor.”

Differences and estrangements could not be allowed to fester: they must be faced and cleared, then forgotten forever.

“Thou shalt love the stranger as thyself” (Lev. 19:34).

* * *

The Law in many ways made a distinction between Jew and Gentile, to teach them their separateness and holiness. But as to their personal treatment of, and care for, the strangers who chose to dwell among them, there was to be no distinction or discrimination. They must treat them in all respects with love and kindness and even especial sympathy, because they were strangers.

What a wonderful nation, what a pure power for joy and good in the earth, Israel would have been if they had perceived and embraced the true spirit of that wonderful Law that was designed to purify their hearts and lead them to Christ!

This is a lesson for us too—

“Thou shalt love the stranger as thyself.”

—for all these beautiful principles of the mind of Christ must be universal to mean anything at all. *There can be no limits, no restrictions, no exceptions*—or all immediately loses all its eternal, life-giving power and shrivels to an ugly and meaningless sectarianism.

* * *

“Ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof. It shall be a jubilee unto you, and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family” (Lev. 25:10).

Perhaps the most refreshing aspect of the whole Law was its constant emphasis on a new beginning—a frequent, periodic clearing away of all accumulated inequities and disadvantages.

Every fifty years, everyone went back to the possession of his basic inheritance. All debts were cancelled. All big land holdings were broken up. Every family that had fallen on hard times through misfortune or mismanagement was given a fresh new start.

Here, truly, was a revolution indeed! Each person, in his life time, would normally experience one of these marvelous national rejuvenations. Each, whatever his present burden or

disability, would have this glorious prospect to look forward to—

“Proclaim liberty throughout all the land!”

For those who had eyes to see, this periodic joyful jubilee was a great type and promise of the final, glorious, eternal jubilee of jubilees to come.

* * *

“And if thy brother be waxen poor, and fallen into decay with thee, then thou shalt relieve him. Yea, though he be a stranger or a sojourner, that he may live with thee. Take thou no usury of him, or increase” (Lev. 25:35-36).

Paul tells the Galatians—

“Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2).

And James says that this is the “royal law”—that is, the law of the Kingdom, the supreme, ruling law of all laws, the “perfect” law, the “*law of liberty*”—

“Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Lev. 19:18).

How is this the “*law of liberty*”? How can law be liberty? Because, as John says—

“We have passed from death to life, IF we love the brethren” (1 Jn. 3:14).

—ALL brethren, brethren universally. Truly this is glorious liberty indeed! The Law of Christ, the Law of the Kingdom, the Law of Moses—all are one in spirit and in purpose.

“That the man of God may be PERFECT” (2 Tim. 3:17).

—may be like God Himself.

“If thy brother be poor, thou shalt relieve him, that he may live with thee” (Lev. 25:35).

“But he, willing to justify himself, said: Who is my neighbor?” (Lk. 10:29).

That is: How cramped and narrow can I make the application and obligation, and still technically satisfy the law?

* * *

“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with ALL thy heart, and with ALL thy soul, and with ALL thy might” (Deut. 6:5).

This is at the beginning of Moses’ farewell address to Israel that comprises the book of Deuteronomy. It immediately follows his recital of the ten commands that came directly in the voice of God (ch. 5), and it is the start of his own last message.

Two points—two words—deserve especial attention as the heart of the command—“love” and “all.”

No action, no service, no self-denial, no sacrifice—means anything if the motive is not love. And this was the basic principle of the Law of Moses, just as much as of the Law of Christ.

And no action or service means anything unless it is TOTAL. *God abominates half-measures and half-heartedness.* Not so much because of the quality of the service itself (for at best our efforts are pitiful and puny), but because of the sad state of the heart and understanding that half-service manifests.

God said pointedly of such service (Mal. 1:8)—

“Try offering it to man—try offering it to your master or employer—and see how long you would last.”

Offer your employer a once-a-week, Sunday morning attendance. Offer your employer unfaithful stewardship: squandering his goods on yourself, wasting his paid-for time in self enjoyment, carelessness of his instructions, leaving the work to someone else, ill will toward other employees, serving his enemies—and see what the result would be.

* * *

“What doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, and to walk in all His ways, and to love Him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, to keep the commandments of the Lord, and His statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good?” (Deut. 10:12, 13).

We note especially the direct connection of thought—

“Love the Lord thy God to keep His commandments.”

These are inseparable parts of one harmonious whole, both in the Law of Moses and in the Law of Christ.

There can be no true love without a careful, eager keeping of the commandments, and there can be no acceptable keeping of the commandments except because of, and through the medium of, love. And note the final phrase: *“For thy good.”*

All was designed for their well-being. The Law of Moses was not merely a harsh code, designed to condemn them. Truly its holy purpose was first to expose and condemn the universal tendency to sin and disobedience, but this was only the preliminary part of its glorious manifestation.

* * *

“God loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment. Love ye therefore the stranger” (Deut. 10:18, 19).

The Hebrew mind tended to an arrogant, self-satisfied and exclusive smallness and despising of all the rest of the world. *We, too, face the same danger.* We have been called out, and told

to be separate from, and to have no part in, a world that lies in Godless wickedness.

But we must not become self-centered and thoughtless and indifferent as regards the world. We must let our light shine, that men may see our good works, and this means far, far more than merely preaching the Truth to them.

"God loveth the stranger."

There cannot be a universal brotherhood until there is universal righteousness and truth, but there can—and must—be universal kindness and love.

The Hebrew nation was appointed to be a divine light of guidance and comfort and inspiration in the earth. But they wrapped themselves up in an intolerant and bigoted self-righteousness, justifying themselves by the very Law that was designed to teach them the very opposite characteristics. This can so easily happen to us too.

* * *

"Thou shalt rejoice before the Lord thy God in ALL that thou puttest thy hands unto" (Deut. 12:18).

Surely this goes deeply into the beauty of the law of Christ. They were *commanded* to rejoice. Can we rejoice to order, by command? Is not rejoicing a spontaneous reaction as a result of external experience?

Let us look a little deeper. This could be, in fact, the deepest and most significant command in all the Mosaic Law—

"Thou SHALT rejoice before the Lord in ALL that thou puttest thine hand unto."

How can we rejoice as we helplessly watch the collapse of a long-cherished dream? How can we rejoice in laying a loved one to rest? Here is, perhaps, the greatest secret of all. *God will teach us how, if we will only let Him—*

"With God, ALL things are possible" (Matt. 19:26).

"ALL things work together for good to them that love God and are called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

The great treasure of the Law of Moses, as of the Law of Christ, was this *divine assurance of unassailable, indestructible rejoicing*—this marvelous command to rejoice in everything and for everything—

"For the things that are seen are temporal, but the things that are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:18).

* * *

"At the end of every seven years thou shalt make a release. Every creditor that lendeth ought unto his neigh-

bor shall release it. Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land" (Deut. 15:1, 2, 11).

One of the great beauties of the Law of Moses is its glorious, divine impracticality. Under it, faithfully carried out, Israel would have been a joyful, mutually blessed and blessing community, all elements contributing in love to the common family joy and prosperity.

By gentle, merciful regulations, God sought to teach them the spirit of open-hearted generosity and benevolence and love. He took the sting and harshness out of debt and debtor by a frequent, joyful clearing of the accounts and beginning again.

What tenderness and wisdom is manifested in these marvelous and unearthly regulations! Under the assured shadow of God's constant oversight and care, the usual merciless framework of business and society, whereby the rich oppress the poor, was transformed into an atmosphere of hope and relief.

* * *

"If thy brother be sold unto thee, and serve thee six years, then in the seventh year thou shalt let him go free. Thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy winepress: of that wherewith the Lord thy God hath blessed thee shalt thou give unto him" (Deut. 15:12-14).

The Law of Christ says that if a man will not work, he shall not eat (2 Thess. 3:10). This is only wisdom and kindness, both to the giver and the receiver.

The Law of Christ and the Law of Moses were to build character in both the donor and the recipient. It is not kindness to give what could and should be earned.

Under Moses' Law, a debtor must work out his debt, if he is able. But six years' service was the divine limit. Then the creditor must release him for a new start in life, and, says the Law, "furnish him *liberally*," out of flock, threshing-floor and winepress.

"*Liberally*" means different things to different people; yea, even different things to the same people when considering different things, and whether they happen to be giving or receiving.

The Law strangely, wisely, beautifully—left it open to each heart to apply its own measure of liberality. God often leaves us with such decisions, that we may reveal the true measure of our heart and love for Him.

"HE THAT SOWETH SPARINGLY SHALL ALSO REAP SPARINGLY" (2 Cor. 9:6).

* * *

"Thou shalt not deliver unto his master the servant which is escaped from his master unto thee. He shall dwell with thee in that place which he shall choose. Thou shalt not oppress him" (Deut. 23:15, 16).

This is generally taken to refer only to slaves from outside of Israel escaping into Israel, and not to legitimate bond-servants within the framework of Israel's own laws. This suggested restriction of meaning may be true, or it may be due to the natural mind not being able to receive the full breadth of the Spirit's deep wisdom.

A wider meaning would be more in harmony with the un-earthly spirit of compassion that breathes through all the Law's regulations concerning human relationships—a spirit too lofty and divine for the natural man to encompass.

The Law of Moses is in no sense practical. Naturally speaking, it is utterly unworkable. It depended entirely for its workability on man's faith and God's continuous Providence.

Here again, it so beautifully manifests the spirit of the Law of Christ. The Law of Moses, like the Law of Christ, was a law of faith and trust and childlike, unquestioning dependence upon the assurance of a constant, active, divine control of all natural events.

We can never predicate the meaning of any aspect of the Law of Moses, or of Christ, on the basis of whether it is practical or workable in human society. To do so leaves out the principal ingredients—God's Providence and man's faith.

* * *

"When thou comest into thy neighbor's vineyard, then thou mayest eat thy fill at thine own pleasure. When thou comest into the standing corn of thy neighbor, then thou mayest pluck the ears with thine hand" (Deut. 23:24, 25).

This is one of the most thought-provoking regulations of the Law. As long as there was anything growing, which would be most of the time, anyone could go onto another man's private property and eat as much as they liked, as often as they liked.

We can imagine what would happen to some crops; and a concerted effort of a large mob could, quite legally, ruin anyone.

But COULD it? Here is where the element of faith becomes prominent. What would God permit? This regulation came, and

could only come, from Him who could replenish inexhaustibly the cruse of oil and the barrel of meal.

What are these strange regulations designed to teach us? For we are plainly told that all was written for our instruction and admonition (1 Cor. 10:11).

They are to teach us the utter unreality of what man in his proud ignorance calls reality, and the existence of a true reality which the natural man doesn't, cannot know exists.

"O ye of little faith! Wherefore didst thou doubt?" (Matt. 14:31).

* * *

"When thou hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it. It shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow, that the Lord thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hands" (Deut. 24:19).

How beautifully the Spirit of Christ shines through these commands! How gently yet effectively the wisdom of the Spirit suggests to the godly Israelite that he allow his memory to lapse in the interests of compassion and fellow-feeling!

What a haphazard, but utterly delightful, state of society when a man's spiritual tenderness can be measured by the inefficiency of his farming and the poorness of his memory for forgotten sheaves! *How gloriously different from all man's cramped thoughts and ways!*

Israel could have been a little refreshing oasis of impractical but utterly joyful Paradise in a dreary world of Gentile blight, if they had only had the wisdom to see the real glory and beauty of their holy Law.

So can we, in this our day. The glorious opportunity to enjoy and manifest the unearthly, God-overshadowed life of Christ-likeness is now ours. Israel failed. Will we?

God Enthroned In the Ecclesia and Our Lives

This morning our thoughts will be on the structure of the Mosaic tabernacle as a whole and its significance as the pictorial manifestation of God, revealed among men. All the tabernacle appointments were for glory and for beauty; for Divine glory and for spiritual beauty.

Glory and beauty characterize everything pertaining to God, and we must get in harmony with the glory and beauty of God, for literally we are ugly; sin is ugly, the flesh is ugly; human nature is ugly.

Moses' face shone with the glory of God, for when he came down from the revelation of these things he had to cover his face, for Israel could not look upon him.

Paul tells us that this symbolizes their groveling, earthly blindness; that true believers see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ; that they grow daily more like Him from glory to glory. Glory means excellence and excellence means betterness.

We are changed into the same image from glory to glory, from betterness to betterness, closer and closer to the divine ideal, to the perfect beauty of character, spirituality, divinity, godliness.

The whole purpose of our lives is to increase in glory and in beauty, in excellence, in holiness, in godliness, in beauty of character, in fulness of love, in depth of understanding. If this does not occur, we live in vain.

Solomon declares—

"God has made everything beautiful in His time" (Ecc. 3:11).

Only beauty, true beauty, is eternal. All else must pass away. The very existence of beauty, the basic beauty of all God's works from the smallest to the greatest is one of the greatest arguments for divinity and is against the theory of evolution. Evolution is blind, earthly, grubby, carnal. It has no place or explanation for beauty and for glory.

The Tabernacle was God's plan, God's initiative, God's instruction.

"See thou make it according to the pattern shown thee"
(Ex. 25:40).

It was a great act of love and condescension upon God's part to dwell with Israel and to speak with them. God went all the

way in approaching to man and taking them to Himself; but there were very strict regulations, no familiarity, no carelessness, no thoughtlessness in God's presence.

Among the very first things that happened in connection with this Tabernacle was the death of the High Priest's eldest sons, Nadab and Abihu. God must be honored in those who dare approach unto Him: those who dwell in His presence must be sober, mature, circumspect, reverent. God will not tolerate careless, thoughtless, slipshod, halfhearted service.

The next great lesson was that God is only to be found where and how He appoints—

"This is life eternal that they might know thee" (Jn. 17:3),—and He can only be known by that which He reveals about Himself, therefore, it is our wisdom to learn all we can that He has lovingly revealed.

How much do we really study the divine message? Half an hour a day is two percent of our life, and how many do even that? What tremendous dividends we expect from such paltry investments!

There are fifty chapters of the Bible devoted to the Tabernacle and its service; and we are told that all Scripture is given for doctrine, instruction, correction and reproof in righteousness that the man of God may be perfect—we have a long way to go, and these are things that point the way.

As we notice from our readings, particularly in the book of Hebrews, much of the language of the New Testament has its foundation in the Tabernacle service and cannot be understood without a comprehension of these things: the veil, the mercy seat, propitiatory, laver, altar, priest, high priest, the Lamb of God, sacrifice, offering, candlestick, the shedding of blood, the Tabernacle, the Temple, the Passover, the Firstfruits; all these are parts of the picture of the glory and beauty of God that the New Testament reveals in Old Testament terms.

All the deep principles of godliness are graphically and vividly portrayed in the Tabernacle service: holiness, obedience, glory, consecration, beauty, sacrifice, unity, dedication, fellowship, rejoicing, thanksgiving, forgiveness, mercy, reverence and love.

The Tabernacle was the center of the nation's life. This is what gave it purpose, futurity and hope.

It stood in the center of the camp, but it stood majestically alone. The tents of Israel would be of black goat's hair. And in a large central area, separated from all these tents by an open

space, the white walled Tabernacle stood in isolated splendor; a white center of purity in the midst of black humanity, with the overshadowing cloud of God's love and providence hovering above it.

Well could Balaam say as he looked down upon this sight from the heights of Moab—

"How goodly are thy tents O Jacob, and thy Tabernacles, O Israel" (Num. 24:5).

—a beautiful God ordered array with God in the center.

Apart from this, Israel would be just another dark, purposeless human mass, but this glorious object in their midst and their divinely instructed arrangement around it gave the whole assembly meaning and purpose and a divinely established dignity. It lifted them from the common perishing horde and related them to eternity.

Human life, without God, is a dark and meaningless tragedy of sorrow and of death—a purposeless existence of a few brief joys, ever increasing heartache, and eventual black oblivion.

"Vanity of vanities, all is vanity," but God in the midst changes everything from darkness to light, for God is a God of hope, and of life and futurity, of beauty and holiness and glory.

The Tabernacle taught all these things. God enthroned in the midst of Israel, in the ecclesia, in our hearts and lives. How great is His beauty and how great is His goodness.

The pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night showed God's preservation and care and guidance and overshadowing love for His people. It visibly manifested His presence and favor to all Israel.

Only the High Priest entered the Most Holy and he but once a year, and only he saw the shekinah glory of God's manifestation between the Cherubim, and even then it had to be obscured by the cloud of the incense lest he die, but even the humblest and the farthest removed could see the cloud over the Tabernacle.

"When the cloud moved, they moved, and when it stayed they rested" (Num. 9:23).

What a tremendous privilege to move with God, to go where He goes, to stay when He stays, to always be in step with God, borne along by His manifested presence; no other love or interests but to follow God. The wilderness pilgrimage was a glorious privilege or a bitter burden, according as Israel saw it with natural or with spiritual eyes.

Israel was closer to God then, than at any time in their subsequent history. They had a far greater manifestation of His presence and power; but the most outstanding of the Tabernacle lessons, as Paul points out, was that it was a barrier.

It signified that the way into the Holiest was not yet made manifest; but still, it bore a tremendous message of condescension for the present and promise for the future.

It taught them of God's unapproachable holiness, but it also showed them His love. It held them at a distance, and yet it foreshadowed perfect communion in the end. Christ came, "*not to destroy the Law but to fulfil it*" (Matt. 5:17); to fulfil all its glorious prophecies and promises.

In His love and wisdom, God always tempers outward restriction with inward promise; outward sorrow with inward joy. Even in our present wilderness journey every tribulation has its compensating greater blessing, and every loss has its compensating greater gain.

When Moses went up into the mount for forty days, the very first thing that God said to him was (this is recorded in Ex. 25 at the beginning of the chapter)—

"Speak unto the children of Israel that they bring me an offering."

What can man offer to God? And yet, God allows us to give. He gives us first that we may have the pleasure of giving to Him, for all is of Him.

"And let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them" (Ex. 25:8).

This was the first message—

"And there will I meet with the children of Israel" (v. 22).

Fifteen (three times five) different types of gifts are commanded to be brought, but the essential requirement was, as we read in verse 2, "*of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart ye shall take my offering.*"

Nothing grudging, no compulsion, every one whose heart stirred him up to come unto the work of the Lord to do it.

Are we among the joyful and blessed number, whose heart stirs them up continually to the work of the Lord? Not as a duty, a task or a burden, but as an eager, irresistible fire in our bones.

What an inestimable blessing. Yet this divine joy is freely available to all who seek it.

As with the Mosaic Tabernacle, so with the everlasting Tabernacle that God is building from the human race, an eternal

dwelling place of God by His Spirit. It must be from the abundance of eager and willing hearts.

In Exodus 36:5 we read that "*the children of Israel brought too much,*" and they had to be stopped from bringing. God would accept no more.

There are two deep and solemn lessons here; first, the time comes when it is too late. Those who had been dilatory, who had not brought up to that time, now had no opportunity to take part in the Tabernacle. The door was shut.

And secondly, how do we compare with Israel in this matter? Could it ever be said of us that we bring too much—too much liberality, too much labor in the work, too much devotion to divine things, too much manifestation of love?

Is there any possible danger that what we have done for God may be considered an over abundance; or could it possibly be the other way around—too little?

The most precious things of the Tabernacle, those most significant of Christ and his work, must be carried by hand. Both the altars, the table of shewbread, the candlestick, the ark, were all borne upon the shoulders by staves. These things could not be carried in carts, though carts were available.

It must be personal human labor—nothing mechanical, nothing impersonal, nothing delegated. For the important things of life only personal care and attention and effort will do. Do we perceive the lesson? Salvation is a very personal thing, calling for very personal effort and labor.

There were six carts that carried all the outer framework of the tabernacle. This is all our external ecclesial framework and organization, but the inner things must be borne for the whole long wilderness journey on loving and consecrated shoulders.

An ecclesial organization will not save us. Our salvation will depend upon how faithfully and lovingly, and above all, how joyfully and cheerfully we have put our own shoulder to the work of the Lord.

We are impressed with the compactness of the Tabernacle. It was all separate pieces easily taken apart for removal, and yet full provision was made for knitting and bonding it together firmly, that it should be a unity, one Tabernacle. Bonding, linking, stabilizing, joining together is a prominent feature throughout all its construction.

We can readily see in natural things that the more firmly anything is bound together the stronger it is, the more it can

withstand, the more it can accomplish; but do we perceive the importance, the absolute necessity of this in spiritual things?

The Tabernacle consisted of three parts, the court, the Holy Place, and the Most Holy, and these three contained among them seven items, two in the court, the altar and the laver (sacrifice and sanctification); three in the Holy Place, the table of shewbread, the candlestick and the altar of incense (fellowship, testimony and worship); and in the Most Holy two, the ark and the mercy seat above it (the manifestation of God in Christ).

And we see a straight line, the altar, the laver, the altar of incense—redemption, sanctification, intercession, worship and prayer; and then the veil that was rent to give access to the perfect state when God shall be all in all.

In the Holy Place, the present probation of God's people, on the one hand is the candlestick, the irradiating testimony, both within the ecclesia and to the world, and on the other hand the table of shewbread, fellowship and communion together and with God—for the "bread of the faces" or of God's presence.

Regarding the boards we read in Exodus 26 (these are the boards that make up the framework, Ex. 26:15) —

"Thou shalt make boards for the Tabernacle of shittim wood, standing up."

Why standing up? Why were not the boards lying down horizontally as in any ordinary construction? Could we possibly miss the meaning and the lesson? Are we standing up? Standing up for the Truth? Standing up for the work of the Lord? Standing up to the full stature of the perfect man in Christ Jesus? Paul says—

"Put on the whole armour of God . . . that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth" (Eph. 6:13, 14).

"The evil day" that can prevent us from being found standing at the end can come in many deceptive ways, some very pleasant to the flesh, not perceivable to the natural eye as evil at all, only evil in their final consequence.

We must keep standing, even when weary and it is much more pleasant to lie down with the world.

The boards were not only standing, but they were standing close together, shoulder to shoulder, no space between them, and they were knit together on each side of the Tabernacle by five bars, and each board reached down two tenons (the original word is hands)—two hands into silver foundation sockets of

redemption in Christ, and each board was covered and preserved by the pure gold of present faith and future immortality.

The sockets of silver supported the boards, and they separated them from the earth. The boards had originally been trees, rooted naturally in the earth, but they had been selected, cut down, brought low, stripped of all their branches and natural glory—shaped, trimmed, smoothed, and dressed to fit God's pattern—and then overlaid with purest gold.

Now they had no connection with the desert upon which they stood, but a very close and intimate connection with one another and with the pure silver sockets of redemption, and with the glorious curtains of righteousness and beauty.

They were fitly framed together and builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit. They were all perfectly equal in height for one is their master and they are all brethren.

The silver sockets were the one exception to the freewill character of all the materials of the Tabernacle. The gold of faith was the freewill offering of all, both men and women, but "*the redemption silver*" was the compulsory requirement for the men only. One half shekel for each male, the rich could not give more and the poor could not give less, all stood upon equal footing as regards redemption in Christ (Ex. 30:13-15).

Freewill offering here was not enough, this was a ransom for man's forfeited life—

"Each man shall give a ransom for his soul of one half shekel." His helpless bondage to sin and need for redemption must be emphasized in the foundation of this building. Here is something that no amount of voluntary offering, eager and freewill though it might be, could accomplish.

There was more silver used in the Tabernacle than gold and brass combined. The atoning sacrifice of Christ must be the major foundation aspect of the way of salvation. He must have the pre-eminence in all things, as we read in the first chapter of Hebrews.

The boards were knit together by five bars on each side, four bars through the golden rings on each board, and a fifth bar "right through" the center of the boards.

"And he made the middle bar to shoot (reach) through (sever) the boards from the one end to the other" (Ex. 36:33).

(See "Law of Moses" pg. 139, third edition.) Here is a strange combination of the four, five symbol; four visible bars and one

hidden one, making five. What is it that holds the ecclesia together, that makes it a unit, that changes it from a number of boards standing precariously alone, to one firm Tabernacle, the house of God?

Though many things can unite temporarily and carnally, there is only one thing that can unite spiritually and eternally, and that is the Truth, the law, the word of God.

Here are four manifested bars clasped to each board by a golden ring of faith, the universal Cherubim gospel of Christ, and one hidden bar shot through the wall from end to end, and hidden in the heart of every board, the foundation of all, the law of God in the heart making five in all.

Bars are to bind together to keep out that which does not belong, to give protection and security, rigidity, stability. They are a girding and a strengthening, loins girded with the Truth, only the Truth can accomplish all this.

The cloth coverings are distinguished into three parts, the first of which is the Tabernacle. (In the original the Hebrew is "*miskan*;" this word is from the same root as "*shekinah*"); the inner dwelling. This does not carry the idea of impermanence or temporariness, it simply means dwelling, particularly in a religious or divine sense—that is the first linen layer, the dwelling place or *miskan*.

The second layer was the tent of goat material, the "*ohel*;" this is the true meaning of tent or temporary dwelling. The distinguishment into the three layers is clear and significant. The covering of the two outer layers were ram skins (the third), and badger skins or seal skins, the word is a little indefinite; it was natural skins of some sort.

The first alone is the actual Tabernacle, the ten linen curtains, two groups of five; two groups knit together by fifty golden fasteners. Here again is the double five symbol, and the fifty fasteners of gold turn our mind immediately to Pentecost, the connecting link between Jew and Gentile.

These ten curtains were of the same material as the veil, blue, scarlet, purple and fine twined linen, worked with cunning work of Cherubim. These ten curtains are the Christ-Body, as the veil is the Christ-Head.

They alone are the true tabernacle, the rest is simply temporary scaffolding and covering. This great embroidered linen sheet, fifty feet by seventy feet, approximately, covered the entire Tabernacle, top, sides and back.

The second layer was of goat's hair, eleven curtains and slightly larger each way than the linen covering. These are in two uneven groups, five and six and they are united, not by golden fasteners but by brass fasteners, fleshly fasteners.

This second layer of goats hair is the earth that helps the woman, the natural goat class. They obscure the true linen curtains; this is all the world can see of the Tabernacle.

The five, the word or law of God unequally yoked together with the six by fleshly brazen fasteners, the number of man and of the flesh. Here we can see the unequal yoking of some who claim to be God's people with the world. This covering is useful in its place as a temporary shield, but it is not the true eternal Tabernacle.

It is very easy to belong to this half and half class; many of us will find in the end that that is where we have been, half in and half out, half in the Tabernacle, half in the Truth, and half in the world, the five yoked with the six, an unequal yoking.

When the Son of Man comes, his sad but necessary task will be to separate the sheep from the goats.

The third layer was ram skins dyed red. Here is blood, aggression, the power of the sword. Here clearly are the powers of the world whose sole real purpose in existence, though they know it not, is for the protection of the Tabernacle.

And finally, the fourth outer layer of badger or seal skins, just a final natural outer covering laid over all. This final covering is nature or creation itself. The lesson is that all things are for the sake of God's elect, all creation is for their good; great nations come and go just to forward slightly God's purpose with His people.

Are we worthy to be the center of the purpose of creation? The fine linen will finally be found to be so worthy, and there is no reason why we should not be among them, if we make this the sole and consuming desire of our lives.

Finally, we consider the veil; the veil that separates the Holy Place from the Most Holy; the veil of his flesh, as Paul describes it, that which stood in the way, that which obscured the way, and had to be torn asunder that the way may be opened.

This is the meaning of the word veil, that which separates, shuts off or obscures. This veil was held up, manifested on four pillars, the four Cherubim pillars, the four gospels, the four-fold camp of spiritual Israel. The veil was of the same material as the ten inner linen curtains—Christ and his brethren are

one. Fine linen of strong closely twisted threads interwoven with blue, scarlet, and purple, and skilfully embroidered with Cherubim figures.

The word translated “needlework” in connection with the embroidery of these Cherubim really means “skilfully”, and its root meaning we find is to combine colors into a pattern, though it is used of any skilful work.

We see the great fittingness in the work of God in Christ, skilfully combining the heavenly blue with the earthly scarlet to produce the royal and victorious purple. The creating of the Cherubim is all the skilful work of God.

“It is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13).

Our part is simply to submit, to expose ourselves to the divine light and let it do its work: to empty ourselves with all that interfered with the work of God in us: to keep a steadfast unwavering gaze upon the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, that we may thereby be changed into the same image from glory to glory. It is all something that is done to us, not that we ourselves do.

This word “needlework” or embroidery occurs nine times in the Scriptures, eight times in connection with the Tabernacle, and once in that remarkable prophetic passage in Psalm 139 concerning Christ—

“I will praise thee for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works . . . my substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought” (that is the word, embroidered, skilfully and beautifully worked) *“in the lowest parts of the earth”* (Psa. 139:14, 15).

This is the same word as the “embroidery” of the Cherubim upon the veil and the curtains.

When Christ died, when the sacrifice was complete, this veil was miraculously rent asunder; the way into the Holiest was opened, the Mosaic shadows were at an end. He said, *“it is finished”* (Jn. 19:30), completed, perfected. At that moment all the marvellous imagery of the Mosaic Tabernacle reached its climax and fulfillment.

The world’s hopeless darkness had been turned into joyful light; sin had been conquered, death had been destroyed, truth and holiness were victorious, and the grave had lost its power. Paul said, in summing up his wonderful exposition of the Mosaic patterns to the Hebrew brethren—

"Having therefore, brethren, boldness (or confidence) to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us through the veil; that is to say, his flesh; and having an high priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled (with the sacrificial blood) from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water (in the laver) let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works" (Heb. 10:19-24).

We note how he combines the sublime with the practical, the highest vision of the future with the most pressing command for the present; love and good works; a beautiful all sufficient combination—love and good works. How do we provoke any one to love and to good works? To provoke is to stir up to activity, either for good or otherwise.

We provoke to love and to good works by manifesting love and good works: love begets love and nothing else will; love cannot be commanded, it must be taught, manifested, exemplified.

There is no point in merely preaching these things, we must manifest them, praying that God will provide vessels for picking up the radiations and carrying them on.

Paul continues—*"not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together."*

This is vital, and it does not just mean Sunday morning, it must be an eager, constant, basic way of life.

"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together"
(Heb. 10:25).

If we do not assemble when there is opportunity to assemble, Sunday morning, Sunday evening, mid-week (let us speak frankly), we are the most blind and foolish of all blind fools. What do we think the way of life is? A once a week ritual like Christendom? Indeed many in the assemblies of Christendom could put us to shame.

If our heart is not with the ecclesial activities always and our bodies whenever possible, we are living a lie and deceiving ourselves.

"Not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as ye see the day approaching" (v. 25).

Earlier in the Epistle (Heb. 3:13) he says, *"exhort one another daily."* Now he says, *"as the day approaches,"* and certainly we are at that era. *"So much the more;"* we should bear this in mind,

in case we feel that a couple of evenings a week is too much to interfere with our personal pleasure or worldly activities.

To the real children of God, those few whom He will acknowledge in the end, the Truth is their whole life, daily, hourly, constantly; they always abound in the work of the Lord; their heart is always in the Truth and the brotherhood: they grieve when they have to miss any ecclesial activity, knowing that the body needs all its members to be healthy and to function.

Let us prayerfully strive to be among the few chosen from the many that are called.

The Court of the Tabernacle

Our thoughts will be upon the Mosaic Tabernacle; the pattern of things in the heavenlies; the pictorial representation of the great mystery of Godliness; God manifest in the flesh, first in Christ and then in a multitude.

The Tabernacle is a wonderful allegory of type and lesson: God enthroned in Israel; first in Israel naturally, and then spiritual Israel. This is the deepest and most beautiful subject in Scripture; this is the heart of the divine purpose, Yahweh Elohim—

"He who shall be Mighty Ones."

—Emmanuel, God with us, the eternal purpose of God to tabernacle with men.

The whole Tabernacle was a picture of the way of salvation. It is called the Tabernacle of Meeting, for there God met with man. It is called the Tabernacle of Witness or Testimony, for it is God's witness, testimony or revelation of Himself; His characteristics, His desires and His purposes concerning man.

A Tabernacle or tent is a temporary dwelling place, nothing fixed or final; it speaks of pilgrimage, or a wilderness journey, of no continuing city.

The present is the Tabernacle wilderness state; we look to the future for the permanent Temple state. We must be ready at all times to move with the Truth wherever it leads, present considerations are secondary and unimportant.

Turning our attention directly to the Court and its contents we note to begin with, that the Tabernacle of God's presence in Israel did not stand exposed in the camp; it could not; it was surrounded by a walled court, a wall of sixty pillars and linen curtains, about one hundred feet by two hundred feet.

The word for court means enclosed or surrounded—

"A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse."

—the same symbolism under a different form. This Court was many things; first it was a barrier; secondly a protection; thirdly a separation, a line of demarcation, and finally a way of approach, for it led around to the gate.

The Court hanging was of fine linen, which stands for righteousness. A separating wall of righteousness is the only way that God could be present in the camp. It was a barrier of righteousness, and yet it led around to a merciful gate of entrance. God is a wall of protection and righteousness: Christ is the gate

of mercy and entrance, and we note that there is only one gate to the Court, only one way in.

All the Priesthood had to wear linen, they could wear no wool which represented the carnal and animal aspect. We read it was fine twined linen: actually it was fine linen, twined or twisted together, that is in multiple threads, each tightly twisted together for strength, "*a threefold cord is not easily broken,*" many individual threads forming one piece, so finely woven together as to be indistinguishable as separate threads.

The ancient fine linen which they have found in tombs had up to one hundred fifty threads to the inch; no thread by itself; each twisted together tightly with its close companions for strength; a pure white, shining, righteous unity, made up of myriads of fine and firmly twisted and interwoven threads.

The wall being a hanging or curtain further conveys the idea of concealment, a veiling of something. This was a characteristic of the Mosaic dispensation; it was a portrayal in veiled shadows of what was to be made clear, and open, and manifest in Christ Jesus.

A gate is a way of entrance, a welcome, an invitation, a point of decision, of commitment, of transition from one state to another, from outside to inside.

The Court was fifty by one hundred cubits, that is it was three hundred cubits all around; the gate was twenty, and so the wall itself was two hundred and eighty that is seven times forty, the fulness or perfection of probation.

It hung, it was held up or manifested on sixty pillars of brass, and these pillars stood on brass sockets and had silver capitals: brass stands for the flesh silver for redemption in Christ Jesus. This combination then would be redeemed flesh, of which Christ, the silver, is the capital or head, manifesting, holding up the white linen righteousness of God.

The pillars were not like pillars usually are, rooted in the ground, but like the boards of the Tabernacle they rested upon sockets, which in turn rested upon the surface of the ground. The Tabernacle was on the earth, but not in it.

Here two principles are clearly manifested; separation from and a lifting above the world by the Christ foundation, and secondly, the thought of pilgrimage, impermanence, no fixed part in the earth.

We notice that the number five is a factor of nearly every measurement of the Tabernacle. It appears to stand for the law,

not just the law of Moses, but for the law of God generally. The Ten Commandments were on two tables of five; there were five books of Moses as there are four gospels of Christ, and so we find fittingly, five and four marking the pillars of the entrances; four pillars to the gate, five pillars to the entrance of the Holy Place, and again four pillars to the entrance of the Most Holy.

If five stands for the Mosaic dispensation or the legal aspect, and four for redemption in Christ, the Covenant in Christ, we may wonder why the first outer one is four as well as the closest inner one.

This appears to illustrate the fact that the Covenant to Abraham, the everlasting covenant, completely encloses the Mosaic dispensation: it is both the old and the new covenant, and therefore we find the first entrance has four and so does the last, with the one with the five pillars in between. It was as John said—

“A new commandment, but still it was not a new commandment, it was the same that they had from the beginning” (1 Jn. 2:7, 8).

The Mosaic was merely a brief period in between, until the Messiah should come.

Each set of entrance pillars held up a hanging or curtain, or veil that represented Christ. Each was of white linen interwoven with blue, purple and scarlet. The last hanging, the third or inner one, the vail of the Most Holy, also had Cherubim woven into it of fine needlework; workmanship to beautify and to glorify—

“A vail of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen—with cherubim” (Ex. 26:31, 32).

Blue appears to stand for heavenly things, the things of the Spirit, and red for fleshly things, earthly things. Adam was so called because he was taken of the red earth. Purple, blue and red combined is royalty and kingship.

We saw that there were sixty pillars in the Court, that is five times twelve, the Mosaic figure times the basic Israelitish figure. There are forty-eight boards in the Tabernacle, the more inner dispensation; here is four times twelve: four seems to apply to the gospel dispensation, as five to the Mosaic.

Four is the number of the Cherubim, the glorified multitude in whom God is to dwell and be manifested. This in turn is the foundation back in the fourfold camp of Israel, for salvation is of the Jews.

The sixty pillars of the Court clearly represent the faithful stalwarts of the Mosaic dispensation, who held up the wall of righteousness during their period of probation.

The term pillar for upstanding men in the Truth is too familiar to be proven. In the Song of Solomon we read—

"Who is this that cometh out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke . . . Behold his bed which is Solomon's; three-score (or sixty) valiant men are about it, of the valiant of Israel. They all hold swords, being expert in war" (S. of S. 3:6-8).

—which of course is the sword of the Spirit, the word of God. The symbolism is quite clear.

The bed or litter of Solomon turns our mind to the Chariot of the Cherubim, that in which God is pleased to dwell and be manifested. The pillars were bound one to another with bars of silver called fillets in the A.V. This word means to join or to cling, and is often translated figuratively, delight, love, desire.

Here again the picture is unmistakable, for it is redemption in Christ that binds all in one and makes the enclosing wall, all the separate pillars, into one solid unity of righteousness.

The pillars had silver hooks: a hook or peg is to hang things by. Solomon says—

"The words of the wise are as nails fastened by masters of assembly" (Ecc. 12:11).

These hooks or nails are the well established teachings of the Spirit's valiant pillar men, upon which we may safely hang our faith, and there is no other safe place upon which to hang it.

Let us be sure that our views, our convictions are not fleshly opinions, especially when they concern things we desire to do. Let us be sure we know what the Word of God says on any matter and that we honestly accept it, and that we take the safe side in any matter of doubt.

If there is any doubt about anything pleasing God why should we jeopardize our salvation to please the flesh? How cheaply do we value eternal life? Isaiah says—

"That Jesus, the word made flesh, is a nail or a hook fastened in a sure place on which all the glorious vessels of his Father's house shall be hung" (22:22-25).

We come through the gate into the Court and it is the Altar of sacrifice that is the first, largest and most prominent object that confronts us: we must make it so in our own lives.

First, largest and most prominent, it is the great central object of the Court; it was of wood overlaid with brass, about

ten foot square, and five foot high. It was right before the worshipper as he entered the Court.

Concerning altars generally, the Scriptural instruction is that no tool of man should be raised upon them, for anything man did would pollute it: it must be bare earth or undressed stones; for man can do nothing to provide the means of reconciliation and salvation; it must be wholly God's workmanship.

This Altar conveys the same lesson in a different form; for the pattern was of God; God selected the workmen and especially endowed them with wisdom and ability, strengthened them, made them strong for Himself, but the material of the Altar was wood and brass. It was material supplied by the freewill of eager men.

This is a divine mystery, everything is of God, and yet we must do our part, but even that part is of God too—

"Work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12).

But Paul immediately adds (v. 13)—

"For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure."

Even our willing and doing is of God, for of ourselves we can do nothing, but we must on our part seek for it, prepare ourselves for it, with fear and trembling.

The word for Altar means a place of slaughter, or sacrifice. The first thing in the Tabernacle service is sacrifice, the shedding of blood, the giving of life.

There can be no putting away of sin, no reconciliation with God without first the fullest repudiation of sin, and this can only be done by sacrifice, perfect unblemished sacrifice.

Complete self-sacrifice is the ultimate of love and obedience: obedient unto death, even unto the death of the cross—

"Greater love hath no man than this."

—herein is its power and its beauty; this alone has the power to take away sin.

The purpose and meaning of sacrifice is *not human punishment*, but divine vindication as a basis of divine mercy; repudiation and condemnation, putting away sin, the establishment of a foundation of holiness.

The Altar had four Horns; four speaks of universal extent, four winds, four universal empires, four corners of the earth. Horns denote power, protection, exaltation and security. Four Horns portray universal power and dominion.

The Horns were of one piece with the Altar like the Cherubim with the Mercy Seat, for the power or glory represented by these Horns was not something separate, just conferred arbitrarily upon Christ, but it was an essential inseparable aspect of his perfect sacrifice: the grave could not hold him: I have power to lay down my life and I have power to take it up again: the power of perfect righteousness: the Horns were of one piece with the Altar. The Horns were the holiest part of the Altar. Upon them was sprinkled the blood of the most solemn sacrifices.

We notice in the chapter read, Exodus 27:8 "*hollow with boards shalt thou make it.*" Hollow, the word means empty; this is a significant instruction, it must be an open framework.

Paul, speaking of Christ to the Philippians, says that Christ emptied himself; in our translation it is "*made himself of no reputation*" but the original, "*he emptied himself.*"

So to be a suitable Altar we must empty ourselves. Of what? Of everything, for all that we have or contain is of the flesh; all our desires, pleasures, advantages, attainments. If any man thinks himself wise, let him become a fool. Love seeketh not her own. Let no man seek his own but every man another's welfare.

"Hollow with boards shalt thou make it."

We sing, "Chase this self-will through all my heart," but how many of us really mean it? How many really desire to give up their self-will? What a mockery to sing such words without whole heartedly meaning them, without an agonizing effort to fulfil them.

"Is there a thing beneath the sun that strives with Thee my heart to share; ah, tear it thence, and reign alone, the Lord of every motion there."

How easily we can sing it, but do we know what we are talking about? Do we understand it? and live in harmony with it, or are they just pleasant sounding words and a pleasing tune? Let us be very careful that we mean what we say to God, for God hath no pleasure in fools.

In Exodus 27:4 it says—

"And thou shalt make for it a grate of network of brass."

The lower half of the vertical sides of the Altar was an open network or grating. The network serves two purposes, it lets in and it keeps out. This would keep out all that did not belong in, but it would let in the one essential thing for the combustion and consumption of the sacrifices; the air or wind.

To be useful to God, besides being empty we must be open, not open to everything, but open to the mighty rushing wind of

the Spirit's influence, that the purifying fires of tribulation may fully consume the flesh, otherwise there would just be dark and smoky smoldering, incomplete combustion.

We are all far too closed up within ourselves, too filled up and too closed up; we must empty ourselves and open up and let the Spirit of Christ flow in; make room for it; that is our part of the task, and God will do the rest. Paul said to the Corinthians (6:11-13)—

"O ye Corinthians, our mouth is open unto you, our heart is enlarged. Ye are not contracted in us, but ye are contracted in your own affections . . . be ye also enlarged."

The Altar fire was first kindled by God and it was never to be allowed to go out. God has in His infinite condescension and love kindled a fire in us. How strong is that fire? A weak little fire will never consume the flesh, only char it and smoke it, and leave it blackened and raw.

It was only with fire from this Altar that incense could be offered. Herein was the great sin and folly of Nadab and Abihu. It is only through a oneness with Christ's sacrifice that acceptable prayer and worship to God can be offered.

We are not now speaking of rituals, but of realities. Paul said—

"I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus."

If we suffer with him we shall reign with him, if we die with him we shall live with him. A technical relationship is not sufficient, it must be a living reality for the prayer to be acceptable.

Careless offering brought instant death to Nadab and Abihu; they were in the act of serving God, but not as He commanded; they were doing it their way, man's way.

Again, presumptuous offering brought instant death to Korah, Dathan and Abiram, and again it was in the very act of worship to God that they were destroyed; and the censers of Korah, Dathan and Abiram were made into broad plates to cover this brazen Court Altar. It should be beaten plates, as in the Revised Version.

It may appear strange that the instruments whereby sinners transgressed should be made permanent parts of such a holy thing as the Altar of sacrifice. What does it teach us? That God makes even the wrath of men to praise Him.

We see foreshadowed the enmity of Israel as an essential element of Christ's sacrifice. In type, Moses was perfected in obedience by the opposition of sinners, and their instruments

were struck down and beaten flat, and made to serve the glory of God as a sign to Israel. This divine principle is clearly enunciated in Scripture. In Psalm 76:10 it says—

“Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee, the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.”

God will use the sinners as suits His purpose to His own glory and destroy the rest. We need have no fear or regrets when the unjust appear to trample upon the just, for they are simply instruments of God adding glory to the sacrifice.

There is another lesson in this matter of the censers of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, a serious lesson, a principle that appears throughout the whole Law. Anything once offered to God could never be withdrawn, never again be used for a common purpose. It was dedicated, devoted, consecrated. If it could not be used, if it was not suitable for use, it must be destroyed.

We have offered ourselves to God, and according to His immutable law, we can never again be used for any other purpose except His service. If we have worldly interests, engage in worldly things, we are violating this first principle of holiness; and if we persist, we must be destroyed.

For this Altar, God specified pots, shovels, basins, flesh-hooks, and fire pans. Does God take care for pots and shovels?

These things, though humble and commonplace, were necessary for the work, and who are we to say that these vessels were any less important to God than the most prominent and glorious ones. No servant is too obscure, no task is too mean to be unimportant in God's sight.

We are told that in the Kingdom every pot in Judah and Jerusalem shall be holiness to the Lord (this is recorded by Zechariah).

Why must every last insignificant pot be holy? Because, for holiness to mean anything, it must reach down into every aspect and facet of our lives; if it is not all, it is nothing. There is no such thing as ninety-nine percent pure.

The ashes were carried out to a clean place without the camp. Christ was laid in a new tomb without the gate. Ashes signify sorrow and mourning, but they also signify hope, for they are the fruit and the proof of the sacrifice; that which has passed through the fire. They must be gathered up and carried to a clean place, for from these ashes God will build again in glory and in beauty.

We pass beyond the Altar to the Laver of sanctification. This was in many ways the strangest and most mysterious aspect

of the whole Tabernacle service; so little is revealed concerning the laver.

Unlike all the other elements of the Tabernacle no instructions are given for making it; no description is given concerning its size; no provision for its carrying; no mention of any covering when it is carried. All that we know is that it was made of the looking glasses of faithful women and that the priests must wash in it continually, *"lest they die."*

It was in the Laver arrangement that we find the greatest change and the greatest increase in capacity occurring between the Tabernacle and the Temple of Solomon. Here there is one Laver for all washings; in Solomon's Temple, there is a huge sea holding twenty thousand gallons for the priests to wash in, and ten great Lavenders—each holding three hundred and fifty gallons, and each standing on a seven foot square wheeled base.

The Tabernacle represented the present pilgrimage; Solomon's Temple represents the Millennial rest. There the original single Laver becomes a separate sea for the sanctification of the Priesthood, and ten Lavenders for the cleansing of the nation's sacrifices; a tremendous opening up of the way of sanctification.

The Priests must wash continually in the Laver *"lest they die."* There must be a constant, repeated cleansing. How much more vital is the reality than the shadow! There are many passages that tell us what this cleansing is.

"Sanctify them through thy truth, thy word is truth" (Jn. 17:17).

"Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way, by taking heed thereunto according to thy word" (Psa. 119: 9).

"That he may sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word" (Eph. 5:26).

"Ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you" (Jn. 15:3).

The word is the cleansing agent, but it will not cleanse unless it is honestly applied; merely sitting in a bathtub playing with the water will never get us clean.

There must be effort and application; we must apply it to ourselves, and we must constantly study it wanting to learn, wanting to discover and eliminate all that is out of harmony with God.

We are lost if we search it merely to justify the flesh, merely to confirm our own desires: if we seek to weaken and evade the searching Spirit word to get around the commandment that

crosses our own pleasures, rather than fearlessly expose every twisted and deceptive motion of the flesh with its piercing light.

The churches of the world, when they do not like any particular command, say that it does not apply today; that was merely for the time when written, and we can find the same outlook among many who should know better.

The Laver was made of the looking glasses of faithful women; women who recognized the true value of spiritual adornment, spiritual cleansing, and the empty foolishness of fleshly painting and adornment. Here again Scriptural reference points out the clear meaning. James (1:23, 24) says—

“If any be a hearer of the word and not a doer he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass for he beholdeth himself, goeth his way and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.”

How clearly this expresses our Sunday morning penitence and brief, brave, once a week resolve.

Most of us are very careful about our natural washing lest we offend man and suffer embarrassment ourselves, but how infinitely more urgent that we constantly examine ourselves in the mirror of the Truth and cleanse our hearts and lives in the Laver of the word lest we offend God and find embarrassment at the end.

The Laver teaches that the sacrifice of Christ is not the end but the beginning of the race for life, the good fight of faith. The lesson of the Laver is holiness over and over and over again—

“Without holiness no man shall see God.”

The mercy and goodness of God provide the way of cleansing, but only by taking advantage of the cleansing can we gain its benefits. God will not bless us and forgive us in our natural human filthiness.

His mercy consists of making provision whereby we may become clean, and we must lay earnest and fearful hold upon that provision, the heart-searching Spirit word.

It is the Laver that introduces the water element into the Tabernacle service. Water is very prominent in Scripture from the first chapter of Genesis to the last of Revelation.

Water is health, refreshment, fruitfulness, cleansing and life; particularly cleansing and life, two closely related thoughts, for only the pure in heart shall see God.

Ezekiel's Temple, the heart and center of the Millennial age; is the source of the water that gives life to the nations, and in the last chapter of Revelation a pure river of water of life, clear

as crystal, proceeds from the throne of God and the Lamb, and flows eternally with life sustaining power through the wood of life, the glorious forest of the trees of righteousness, the paradise of God, His immortal saints. Here is the Laver in its fullest development. The Holy Place is the present position of God's people.

The Laver was outside the Holy Place in the Court. If it portrays the continual purification and cleansing of God's people by the word at the present time, should it not be in the Holy Place? If we consider it, we can see why it should not. There is no washing in the Holy Place.

Holy means clean; nothing unclean can enter. When we defile ourselves in thought, word or deed, we put ourselves outside. We must quickly wash in the Laver and re-enter to be safe, for the Holy Place is not just a position of holiness; it is a condition of holiness. Again we are dealing with realities and not ritual; real and living facts.

If we are not holy, we are not in the Holy Place, whatever our technical position may be in our own sight or in the sight of others.

The Laver teaches us that life in Christ is a probation, a life of constant washing, purifying, perfecting; and it is not just a matter of repenting for our particular sins and cleansing from our mistakes; we must go deeper than that.

It is a lifelong cleansing by the word from our natural fleshliness of mind to spiritual mindedness, a complete transformation, a changing by degrees to the glory of the Lord.

Our brief lifetime is none too long for this tremendous process. We have no time for anything else.

Mercy

"Yahweh, Yahweh Elohim, merciful and gracious, long suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty" (Ex. 34:6, 7).

"Merciful, gracious, longsuffering, abundant in goodness, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin." This is how God chooses to manifest Himself. This is the aspect that He emphasizes. This is His basic character and will.

He makes every effort to get men to put themselves into the channel of His goodness; to accept His blessings; to seek His help and comfort and mercy and forgiveness. All the emphasis is upon joy and reconciliation, *but*—He will by no means clear the guilty.

God made special manifestation of Himself to David, as is so marvelously revealed in the inspired Psalms. David was called the man after God's own heart. He was not perfect. He had weaknesses and failures and serious mistakes.

"They that are whole have no need of a physician" (Mk. 2:17).

But he had an intense, continuous consciousness of the reality and closeness of God. The basic pattern of his life was a mighty faith that feared nothing, and a close, mutual communion with God. And when he failed, he humbled and redeemed himself, and accepted lifelong tragedy with undiminished love for the chastening Hand.

Let us read the Psalms over and over. They give the inner soul of the man who, in great tribulation, found peace in God: the man to whom God was an over-whelming, ever-present, personal reality—*"a man after God's Own heart."*

Whenever there has been a special closeness to God, and manifestation by God, there has always been greater testing and trial. Where much is given, much is expected.

"God chasteneth every son whom He receiveth" (Heb. 12:6).

"If a branch bring forth fruit, He purgeth it that it may bring forth more fruit." (Jn. 15:2).

The lives of such men as Moses, David, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Nehemiah, had great sorrows and difficulties and losses and disappointment; but *also* great satisfaction in closeness and

service to God, as useful parts of the eternal purpose of ultimate Divine manifestation in and through mankind.

In the Christadelphian Instructor, under the question, "What does the Bible reveal concerning the character of God," the first sentence is this—

"He is kind, yet inflexible in the requirements of His Law."

There can be no better summing up of the whole picture: infinitely kind, yet absolutely inflexible in matters of right and wrong; infinitely merciful, longsuffering and forgiving, but He rigidly insists upon total, unreserved, absolute submission and a continuous and fearful, enlightened obedience. He demands *everything* we have, but never requires more than is possible. He knows each one's strengths and weaknesses; each one's possibilities and limitations. He makes merciful allowance for stumblings and shortcomings, and knows who are sincerely endeavoring to serve Him with *all* their hearts.

His desire is to help and to build—to teach and to strengthen; *not* to condemn and destroy. *But* He will not for a moment tolerate the slightest degree of carelessness in His service, nor voluntary foolishness, nor willful neglect, nor presumptuous disobedience.

His mercy is not indiscriminate. It operates upon definite, eternal, impartial principles. His mercy is *to bridge the gap* between perfection and the best that man at his best efforts can do.

Those who do not give their best and their utmost do not even put themselves into the channel of the possibility of receiving His mercy. His mercy is not for the purpose of bridging over our carelessness, or neglect, or lack of devotion. It is just to cover our impossibilities *AFTER* we have done our best. The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting, but only upon—

"Those that fear him; to such as keep His covenant and remember His commandments to do them" (Psa. 103:17, 18).

It is never promised to anyone else. Therefore the apostle says—

"Work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12).

God insists, above all, upon absolute, unquestioning obedience. The mind of the flesh will raise a thousand excuses and objections. *Here* is a clear and revealing test between the mind of the Spirit and the mind of the flesh. The mind of the Spirit will always be seeking to *get closer to God*—closer to His will—closer to His commandments. The mind of the flesh seeks all

the loopholes and excuses—all the secondary meanings—that will weaken the command and confuse the issue.

The mind of the flesh can be spotted before a person has uttered half a dozen words. Its approach to the Word of God is so common and universal. Most people, very quickly, reveal the basic pattern of their hearts and interest, regardless of their words or profession.

There is no middle class at the judgment seat of Christ. Just a clear, sharp line: the sheep and the goats—the right hand and the left hand. The right hand are those few who have gone *all the way*, who have not held anything back, who have filled their hearts and minds with God, and have eliminated everything else; the few who have perceived the tremendous value of the prize and have—

“sold ALL and bought it.”

The left hand are all the rest: from the nearlies to the nothings.

It is the *personal aspect* of God’s manifestation of Himself that we need to meditate upon the most fully, and *continuously*, and *deeply*; not the wind or the earthquake or the fire, but *“the still small voice.”*

We need to draw near; to learn the beauty and comfort and desirability and all sufficiency of God. Especially the all sufficiency. If there is something that can perfectly satisfy *all* our needs—from the lowest to the highest—*why* need we seek further? *Why* need we look elsewhere? *God is all sufficient for all needs.*

Other help and comfort and companionship is desirable, but not necessary; not really important. It is to be accepted with thanksgiving if it comes; but to be relinquished, if God will it, without regret.

Anyone who truly *has God*, has everything. David expresses the ideal to which we must strive—

“Whom have I in heaven but Thee? There is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee; my flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. They that are far from Thee shall perish, but it is good for me to draw nigh unto God” (Psa. 73:25-28).

Any experience, harsh though it may be, that helps to lead us to this frame of mind is of the love and mercy and blessing of God.

We must strive to perceive the deep truth of Paul’s words—*“Our sufficiency is of God” (2 Cor. 3:5).*

Every moment of our life, every thought, must be consciously related to God and His purpose.

God is the whole essence and meaning of life. The closer we get to Him, the deeper and fuller our life becomes. *This* is the key to everything: the solution to all problems, the end of all struggle and striving. Our minds must be filled continually with God. *This* is the power that transforms our characters. This is our transition from the natural to the spiritual; from death to life, from passing emptiness to eternal fullness of joy.

“. . . whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, THINK on THESE things” (Phil. 4:8).

Only the things of God so qualify. *Think* on these things; meditate upon them; give thyself wholly to them. These are the words of the apostle.

“Set your affection upon things that are above, not on things on the earth” (Col. 3:2).

The natural mind is petty, self-centered, small, narrow, ignorant and childish. We must *enlarge* our minds, get them onto the track of real and eternal things; clear out all the passing rubbish of the present. This must be the foundation of our mind and consciousness. *All* must be viewed from this one perspective

The degree of the closeness that we attain to God is the measure of our real value and maturity. The degree to which God fills our minds and thoughts is the measure of our wisdom and intelligence. Everything outside of God is stupidity and folly, regardless of how imposing and impressive it may appear in the eyes of a benighted world.

The ideal to which we must pray and strive is a constant, moment to moment consciousness of the manifestation of God: a continuous, unbroken communion and contact; all thoughts with God in the foreground, all actions done as unto God, and in partnership with God, trusting and expecting God's active guidance and assistance in *everything* we do: *every* deed, *every* decision.

We should never wonder—never ask ourselves—if anything is serious or important enough to make a matter of prayer, for this is an entirely wrong conception. For the process to be meaningful, it must be continuous and unbroken.

Life must be a *continuous* prayer—a continuous relationship—in everything, large and small. Everything worth doing is worth praying about. *It must be* prayed about, if we hope to be *in* God and God *in* us. It cannot be on and off, seeking God's help *part* of the time, depending upon ourselves for the rest; deciding what is "important" enough to approach Him about.

We need His help and partnership and presence and comfort in everything that we do. We must live in a continuous atmosphere of *working with God*; for this is the only possible way to control the flesh and to live *in* the Spirit.

This is very prominent in the Psalms: the love of God's law, meditating therein day and night; *not an exaggeration*, but an essential truth. *Anything* we cannot pray about, approach God in, seek His help in, should not be done at all.

And there *are no exceptions* to this rule. Any exception would destroy—completely destroy—the whole pattern of oneness. It must embrace the whole life. There can be nothing held back. Nothing too unimportant to bring into full harmony with the spiritual unity of the individual with God.

It is infinitely more intimate than any *human* relationship, for God can both read and control the innermost thoughts of the heart.

Unity between humans, even at its highest and most beautiful development, is but a groping and a clasping of hands in the dark; comforting, but still agonizingly partial and incomplete.

But *unity with God* has no barriers, no limitations, no obscurities, no disappointments, no misunderstandings. It must be a constant flow of coordination with God in every act. We must believe and expect His help in everything, great and small.

Truly, we never reach this ideal. There are constant lapses and failures. But the important thing is that they be recognized *as such*, and be repudiated and striven against. We can never accept, as satisfactory, anything short of perfect unity with God. This is the whole essence of the manifestation of God.

Paul exhorts (Eph. 4:30)—

"Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God."

Surely this statement is the deepest, most revealing of all aspects of God's manifestation to man.

"Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God."

Why should God, the All-powerful, the All-sufficient—the Possessor of heaven and earth—*why* should *He expose* Himself to being grieved by puny, mortal man?

The essence of love's power is personal involvement. Love, in its working, necessarily exposes itself to hurt. This is the beautiful sacrifice it is willing to make to accomplish its glorious end. And God, above everything, is love.

"Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God."

What *stronger* appeal could there be to goodness, if there is any potential or goodness or spirituality in us at all?

We feel with the apostle—

"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God. How unsearchable are his judgments, and His ways past finding out!" (Rom. 11:33).

"THIS God is our God for ever and ever. He will be our Guide even unto death" (Psa. 48:14).

"Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, Rejoice!" (Phil. 4:4).

Hidden Wisdom of Mosaic 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).

The ordinance of sacrifice did not begin at the time of Moses. Ages before, we find it instituted by God at the very beginning of the dispensation of sin and death, as mortal man's way of approach to Him. The original sentence for disobedience was death. This was established before any sin had occurred. Thus the Divine basis is that—

"Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin" (Heb. 9:22).

Sacrifice is—

- *A recognition and admission of the sinner's liability to the just sentence of death.*
- *An offering to God as atonement for sin.*
- *An evidence of devotion and desire for reconciliation.*

And—above all—

- *A foreshadowing of the Lamb prepared from the foundation of the world, by whom the way has been made open for the sin to be covered and the sinner forgiven.*

From the beginning, then, sacrifice has been the established and ordained basis of reconciliation and approach.

For the two thousand five hundred year period from its inauguration until the Exodus, although it is mentioned repeatedly, we are given very little light regarding the details of its observance.

When, however, the family of Jacob was, through Moses, organized into a complete national polity, the necessity arose for detailed and orderly instruction regarding the various forms, occasions and circumstances in which God was to be approached.

MOSAIC

It is this classified system of approach, with its deep significances, we desire to consider. In all of the ordinances, of course, the basic idea is the same as when instituted in Eden, but inasmuch as the details of the sacrifices varied according to the circumstances and reasons of their observance, it is apparent that the meaning of these details had a definite connection with the occasion.

In this we have a guide, for it is evident that ordinances which are common to all or many sacrifices are of general significance, while those that vary in specific cases have a connection with those particular cases.

Let us then first consider the features common to all.

WITHOUT BLEMISH

To begin with, the sacrifice was to be without blemish. The meaning is clear.

God demands and deserves the BEST. He requires perfection, as far as it is in man's power to give it. To please Him, we MUST put Him FIRST, unhesitatingly and on all occasions.

He, of course, allows for our frailty, but the desire and effort must constantly be toward perfection. *Anything short of our very best effort is displeasing and dishonoring to Him.* Speaking through Malachi (1:8, 10), God says of such an offering—

"Offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person?"

"I have no pleasure in you, neither will I accept an offering at your hand."

Without blemish, too, typified the perfect sacrifice of Christ. Only a perfect animal was a fitting type.

MALE

Then the sacrifice was—with one or two exceptions to which we shall come later—to be male. Again we have brought to our attention the relative positions of men and women in the plan of God.

While in the perfected future there is to be no discrimination, and woman is man's equal as an heir to the kingdom, yet in the present dispensation, God has ordained a difference—

"The head of the woman is the man.

"The man is not of the woman, but the woman of the man.

"Neither was the man created for the woman, but the woman for the man" (1 Cor. 11:3-9).

Man is the image and glory of God (v. 7). It is the image of God in its fullest, deepest sense to which we are striving: the perfect living sacrifice, the New Man which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him who created him (Col. 3:10).

And it is the "Man Christ Jesus" in whom all sacrifice and redemption is centered. Therefore it must be a male animal that is used in the type.

NORTH SIDE OF ALTAR

Thirdly, the offerer was to bring this male without blemish to the door of the Tabernacle and there place his hand upon its

head. In this he identified himself with the animal and recognized his subjection to the death penalty which was the sentence of sin. His sins were *"laid upon it."*

The animal was then led to the north side of the altar and there slain. It was to the North Side of the city, to Calvary, that Jesus was led to be slain. The table of showbread was in the north side of the Tabernacle.

The original for "showbread" throughout the New Testament is *"artous tes protheseos"*—"bread of setting forth." Paul uses the same word (Rom. 3:25)—

"SET FORTH"

"Jesus Christ, whom God had set forth (proetheto) to be a propitiation."

And he uses the same thought (though not the same word) in Galatians 3:1—

"Before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently SET FORTH, crucified among you."

Jerusalem is God's lightstand and altar in the earth—the place of sending forth the Law, and the place of approach and reconciliation.

So it is fitting that the table of showbread was on the north side of the lightstand, and the sacrifice was slain on the north side of the altar.

In the bread and poured-out wine of the Lord's Table, we "show" the Lord's death "until he come" (1 Cor. 11:26).

THE ALTAR AND THE BLOOD

Fourthly, the blood was sprinkled upon the altar and poured out at its base, foreshowing the Perfect Offering whose life—signified by the blood—was offered an acceptable sacrifice to God, and then poured out on account of sin. The altar itself was first sprinkled—

"First for himself, and then for the people" (Heb. 7:27).

—the brazen (flesh) altar, whose design and origination was direct from God, but whose construction was by man—by man especially endowed with the spirit of wisdom and the power of workmanship (Ex. 35:31-35).

The altar was "four-square" (Ex. 27:1), as was the Holy City (Rev. 21:16), the multitudinous Christ, the conquering camp of the saints with its four horns (Ex. 27:2) which, under the figure of the four carpenters or builders, will cast out the four horns of the Gentiles who have had so long ascendancy over God's kingdom in the earth (Zech. 1:18-21).

THE FAT

Fifthly, in all cases the fat was burned upon the altar. Sometimes the whole animal, but *always* the fat. The fat is the choicest part—the “*fat of the land*” is the best of the land’s fruits. As the blood is the life and is forfeit for sin, so the fat is the best part of life, and must be offered to God (Ecc. 12:1)—

“Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.”

Israel was trained to turn toward God with the best of everything they had.

Nothing less than our best and our utmost can fittingly manifest the love and thankfulness and godly frame of mind we must have to please God.

And it must be remembered that the value and acceptability of all the sacrifices lay wholly in the state of the heart and mind that they gave expression to. As mere ritual, they meant nothing to God.

This covers the generalities of the sacrificial ordinances. The subject further falls under two headings—

SIX TYPES

They are: Burnt, Meat, Drink, Peace, Sin and Trespass.

Why six? Doubtless because sacrifice is an element and a recognition of a state that falls short of perfection.

Six is the number of man, of work, of probation. For six day-millenniums creation groans. Seven brings rest, completion, perfection.

Six sacrifices all pointed forward to the sacrifice of Christ which—as the seventh—was a combination of all six, and completed and fulfilled them.

SIX TIMES

The other half of the subject is the periodic ordinances.

These were: Daily, Weekly, Monthly, and the three yearly—Passover, Firstfruits and Tabernacles.

Again six. These were made up in each case of a combination of several of the six types of sacrifice.

First, then—

THE SIX BASIC TYPES

(Burnt, Meat, Drink, Peace, Sin, Trespass)

These are divisible under three subheads, according to their purpose—*Dedication, Thanksgiving, and Expiation*. The first two groups were voluntary, their observance depending upon

the state of mind of the offerer. The third (expiation) was compulsory as the consequence of certain circumstances. God, in His infinite wisdom, has always arranged His ordinances in this way—some compulsory, some voluntary.

Nothing so clearly reveals the heart of a man as does the extent he goes—and joyfully, eagerly desires to go—in his service and dedication to God beyond the strictly obligatory.

The heart that truly seeks God spends all the time and effort it possibly can in the sweet and joyful activity that comprises the range of free, voluntary self-sacrifice—not as a burden or loss, but as a holy privilege of closer communion with God.

* * *

Group One—Dedicatory (Burnt)

This was the Burnt sacrifice, wholly consumed upon the altar. This total consumption on the altar was its distinguishing characteristic. This was the basic sacrifice which related to sin nature directly.

It represented a complete self-dedication of the offerer to God. It was a recognition that the nature of sin separates man from God, and is present as a barrier to complete unity in any transaction between them, and must be utterly consumed out of the way before perfection can be reached.

It pointed forward to the Great Sacrifice in which sinful flesh was wholly destroyed, and a way made open whereby that barrier may be passed. The occasion of this sacrifice was no specific sin or misdoing on the part of the offerer, but it was the answer to a feeling of general unworthiness and a realization of the sinfulness and burden of the flesh.

All at times experience, to an almost insupportable degree, the weight of this disquieting feeling. Paul expresses it when he exclaims (Rom. 7:24)—

“Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”

By this merciful provision of the Law, an Israelite so affected could bring his offering—the very best that he had—see it all consumed upon the altar and the smoke ascending as a token of God’s acceptance and understanding, and go his way with the impression of a fresh beginning and a renewed determination to merit and retain his Lord’s approval.

What a power and comfort there is in a new start and knowledge of being understood!

The Great Burnt Sacrifice has now been offered once for all, and we who have entered into it and seek its blessing have

completely dedicated every fiber of our life and being to the service of God.

Group Two—Thanksgiving (Meat, Drink, Peace)

The other class of voluntary or free will sacrifice is that of Thanksgiving. This included three types: Meat, Drink, and Peace offerings. Roughly speaking, the first two appear to have related more to thanksgiving for Temporal blessing; the third—the peace offering—to Spiritual thanksgiving. These should not be taken as exclusive applications, however.

MEAT AND DRINK OFFERINGS

Taking the natural first, the Meat offering was of the fruit of the field. "Meat" here does not mean "flesh," but rather "food." It was offered either on the occasion of any specific divine blessing, or to express the feeling of general favor well-being. David expresses the position it filled when he says, Psalm 116:12, 17—

"What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits towards me?"

"I will offer to Thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving."

Flour, Oil and Wine

It was of fine flour mingled with oil. Flour and oil, with the wine of the Drink offering, were the chief products of the earth, and the offering of them was a grateful recognition of their source.

In a more figurative sense, the flour seems to represent the blessing of strength, the oil of plenty, and the wine of gladness and joy—to sum up: general well-being as a result of obedience and service to God.

And, in a still deeper, holier sense, it is the strength-bringing heavenly Bread, the enlightening Spirit-Oil, and the joyous, gladdening "Good-News" Gospel Wine.

Incense and Salt Required

Frankincense accompanied every meat offering. Incense, as we know, represents Prayer and Praise. *This is an essential element of approach to God.*

And no meat offering was ever to be made without Salt. (Lev. 2:13). This was vital. Salt plays a very important part in our lives. It was even more so with the ancients, and was one of the chief items of trade.

Besides its preservative and cleansing properties, it is essential to health, and to the palatability of many foods. These qualities made it the recognised emblem of purity, wholesomeness and vigor—

"Ye are the salt of the earth" (Matt. 5:13).

—the small but vital class of agents for the preservation of the purity of the Truth. Hence the significance of salt being required with all meat offerings.

Leaven and Honey Forbidden

And as Salt was required, so Leaven was prohibited. Leaven is fermentation, corruption and sin—*"malice and wickedness"* (1 Cor. 5:8). Clearly no offering is at all acceptable that contains this element.

It may be noted, though, that while leaven is here forbidden, it is specifically required in one or two special cases, where it has a significance that is in harmony and keeping with the general picture.

Beside leaven, Honey, too, is expressly forbidden (Lev. 2:11). As to the meaning of this, we may gather a hint from the words of Solomon who associates it (Prov. 25:27) with self-glory. Honey also is used many times as an emblem of sweetness, but David tells us the judgments and precepts of God are sweeter to the godly mind than honey (Psa. 119:103).

Honey, then, seems to infer something contrasted with, and inferior to, the "more excellent" way of God's law—something sweet to the natural taste, but soon found sickening when largely indulged in—something tending to self-glory.

Is not this the accomplishment of the flesh and the empty praises of ignorant men—the sweetest thing known to those that know not God?

Honey, like leaven, has its place. There is a glory and accomplishment and praise that is legitimate and good.

The pure, divine honey, gathered from the Rose of Sharon and the blossoms of the spiritual fruit, is an element of the eternal joy of the redeemed—

"I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse . . .

"I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey . . .

"Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, beloved"

(S. of S. 5:1).

THE PEACE OFFERING

The other thanksgiving sacrifice, the Peace offering, seems to have a wider and more sublime bearing than the Meat or Drink offerings. As the Burnt offering was the fruit of a sorrowful and reflective state of mind, so the Peace offering was the product of an appreciation of the depths of God's love and care, and a feeling of comforting communion with Him.

From various references, it can be inferred that Peace offerings often followed Burnt offerings. We can see the beauty and harmony in this, both historically and spiritually. The Burnt offering was designed to create the state of mind, and the condition of communion, which the Peace offering expressed.

Unlike all others, in the Peace offering it was immaterial whether the sacrifices were male or female. Both were equally acceptable. Furthermore, this was the only sacrifice of which the offerer himself partook.

There is another unique aspect—leaven was required with this offering. The only other place leaven appears in the sacrificial system is in the Feast of Firstfruits. In both cases it points to the same thing—participation, through mercy, of mortal, erring man in the holy things of God.

In these three particulars—sex, offerer partaking, and leaven—the Peace Offering is unique.

Taken in conjunction with the Burnt sacrifice, the significance cannot be missed. The Burnt consumed all night upon the altar—the Peace following in the morning.

The Burnt replete with the implications of a time of sinful nature and a state of separation and probation: the Peace following as a token of a time of perfect harmony with God and peace among men, when there will be neither male nor female (among the redeemed) in the sense of discrimination and subjection, but all one in Christ Jesus—both equally acceptable, a time when the accepted offerers themselves will partake of the fruit of their long sacrifice.

Even in the peace offering, however, there was the blood sprinkled upon the altar. In his anticipation, the offerer must not forget the present realities. His life was forfeit for sin, it was only by the transcendent mercy of God that he lived at all, and the shedding of blood must be constantly recognized as an essential element of his redemption.

Only the fat of the Peace offering was offered on the altar. We have seen the significance of the fat. The breast (symbolic seat of the emotions) and the right shoulder (strength and accomplishment) were given to the priests (showing that the holy service of God calls for both "*heart and hand*"). The remainder of the edible parts were eaten by the offerer and his family on the same day.

It could also be continued to be eaten on the second day, but any of the flesh left to the third day must be "*burnt with fire.*"

We see that when the "third day" of God's purpose dawns, all things will be "perfected" (Lk. 13:32), and all flesh will be swallowed up in eternal Spirit-fire.

Group Three—Expiatory (Sin and Trespass)

The expiatory, or atoning, offerings were of two kinds—the Sin offering for sins of ignorance, and the Trespass offering for sin committed knowingly.

The Sin offering is the most elaborate and detailed of all the sacrifices. It applied to sin committed unwittingly or uncleanness contracted unknowingly, and was to be offered upon realization or discovery of the condition.

There are two points of comparison between Sin and Trespass offerings to be noted.

Ignorance

The first is that the sin of ignorance, which we might think the lesser sin, called for a more elaborate form of atonement than did the one committed knowingly.

The lesson herein would be that the unconscious, ignorantly persisted in sin is more displeasing to God than that which is known and confessed and due rather to weakness of nature than to carelessness of application to God's Word and instructions.

Among a people (like ourselves) to whom God has condescended to directly give His gracious law and guidance, and whom He has commanded to diligently teach them to their children, and constantly study them and speak about them themselves—among such there is NO EXCUSE FOR SINS OF IGNORANCE.

That seems to be the great lesson here. Surely we can at least take the trouble to *know and confess* God's high standards and requirements of perfection. If that much effort is not willingly and eagerly put forward, then we are hopeless and displeasing indeed.

Degree of Responsibility

The second point of difference between Sin and Trespass offerings is that for the former the offering required was not the same for all offenders. In the case of the Trespass offering (and all other types of offerings) the requirements were the same for all (except, of course, where provision was made for poverty).

THE SIN OFFERING

But in the Sin offering, there were three different grades which increased according to the rank of the offender. These

were (1) for one of the people, (2) for a ruler, (3) for the whole congregation or for a priest. That is, the odiousness to God of a sin committed through ignorance increased with the offender's increased opportunity and responsibility—

"Much is expected from him to whom much is given" (Lk. 12:48).

A man who has the natural ability to be an outstanding success in this life is under greater responsibility to devote his greater, God-given talents to God's work, because that is the SOLE PURPOSE THEY ARE GIVEN FOR—and a solemn reckoning will be required at the Last Day for every talent given. Only blindness and stupidity will ignore this basic and oft-repeated Scripture warning.

Cleansing the Sanctuary

In the case of a priest or the whole congregation (who were considered as a whole a *"nation of priests"*), the Sin offering was a bullock, and the blood must be sprinkled seven times before the veil of the Sanctuary and on the altar of incense.

That is, the very priesthood itself must be purged and cleansed. The sin of one defiled all, because they were one inseparable body or unit. This is of great significance.

The fat was to be burned upon the altar, and the remainder of the bullock was carried without the camp and burned. None was to be eaten by the priests as in the other sacrifices.

The meaning of these items are interwoven, and are explained by Paul in the epistle to the Hebrews. He says that the priests were not permitted to partake of any animal whose blood had been offered to sanctify the whole Sanctuary.

This indicated that while the Law served for the time then present, a greater Sacrifice *outside and beyond the ordinances of the Law* must in the fulness of times be offered to give power and efficacy to the shadowy, prophetic reconciliation of the Law.

To partake of this, the Mosaic priesthood, as such, had no right, for this temporary, schoolmaster-priesthood must be done away before the Real and Greater Sacrifice could come into effect.

Without the Camp

Any animal whose blood sanctified the whole Sanctuary must be burned without the camp. This, says Paul, signifies Christ, who was literally offered *"without the gate."* More deeply, it signified that the seed of the woman must achieve salvation

outside and above the framework of the Mosaic economy, which was "*weak through the flesh.*"

Paul's exposition refers most particularly to the one great central sin offering of the year, when the High Priest on the Day of Atonement entered the Holy of Holies with blood to sanctify the whole sacrificial system.

* * *

In the case of a ruler or of one of the people making a Sin offering, the animal was—respectively—a male or female goat. The blood in these cases was not taken into the Sanctuary but treated in the usual manner. The fat was burned, and remaining edible parts were eaten by the priests.

If the offender were poor the offering could be a bird or—failing even the means to obtain that—a meat offering of flour.

THE TRESPASS OFFERING

The Trespass offering was for sin committed knowingly—robbery by deceit or violence, false swearing, etc. The offering was a ram, or in lesser offences a lamb or kid. The fat was burned on the altar and the remainder eaten by the priests. In addition, that which had been acquired wrongfully was to be restored plus one-fifth of its value.

This offering—it must be noted—was only effective for sins committed in weakness of the flesh and truly repented of. For these sacrifices to be efficacious, there had to be a constant desire to render obedience, though the flesh might err.

For presumptuous, wilful, premeditated, highhanded sin in deliberate knowing disregard of divine command, whether large or small, there was to be no atoning—

"The soul that doeth ought presumptuously, the same reproacheth the Lord. That soul shall be cut off from among his people" (Num. 15:30).

Such cases were beyond the pale and provision of sacrifice. This concludes the six basic types.

THE SIX PERIODIC ORDINANCES

Six periodic ordinances were enjoined upon the Israelites as pictorial representations of the principles and purposes of God's dealings with man, for all with eyes to discern spiritual things.

They were: The Daily, Weekly, Monthly sacrifices, and the three Yearly—the Passover, the Firstfruits (Pentecost), and the great, culminating Feast of Tabernacles (which centered around the Day of Atonement—the apex and climax of their year). First then—

The Daily Sacrifice

This was one of the daily duties of the priest, the other two being the replenishing of the Oil in the golden candlestick, and offering the morning and evening Incense. The daily ordinances typified the parts of God's service which are to be unceasing—which must be repeated every day without intermission.

The daily Oil in the lamp, of course, is daily application to the Word of God, which is a light to our feet. The morning and evening Incense is continual prayer.

The main item of the daily sacrifice was a Burnt offering of a lamb without spot or blemish, both morning and evening. This is the continual condemnation of sin and remembrance of Christ whose sacrifice offers a way of escape from sin.

These three things—signified by the Oil, the Incense and the Lamb—are the basis of the believer's life. They must be indulged in daily, continuously, unceasingly. They are more important and essential than our daily food.

The evening sacrifice was to burn all night on the altar, and in the morning the priest removed the ashes without the camp. So the body of believers is tried by fire all the night upon the altar of their faith. And when the morning dawns, their Great High Priest will return and carry away "without the camp" those who have come through the fire.

With the Daily Sacrifice were offered a Meat offering of flour mingled with oil, and a Drink offering of wine. It is of note that Meat offerings were made in connection with all the periodic sacrifices.

And they are always in exactly the same proportions—1/10 ephah for every lamb (an ephah is about 3/4 of a bushel), 2/10 for every ram, and 3/10 for every bull. The Drink offerings were 1/4, 1/3, and 1/2 hin respectively (a hin is about seven quarts).

That is, the "blessing" offerings were always in exact proportions to the "sacrifice" offerings.

Is this not an assurance that our blessings will be according to our measure of sacrifice and devotion—that "as we sow, so shall we reap"?

This completed the daily ordinances which typified—as we have seen—study of the Word, prayer, the putting away of sin, remembering Christ, and thanksgiving. Truly a day in harmony with man's noblest purpose, and well-pleasing to God.

The Weekly Sacrifice

The weekly sacrifice was a doubling on the Sabbath day of the Daily sacrifice. Two lambs were offered morning and evening,

with the Meat and Drink offerings similarly doubled. This shows a doubling of service to God on a day devoted specially to Him.

Not a different service on the Sabbath which had no connection with the daily life of the believer, but an augmentation of the regular daily service on a day when other matters could not interfere. We see that our service is expected to be continual, and to be increased as circumstances permit.

The Monthly Sacrifice

This was offered on the day of the new moon. After the Day, the Month is the next cycle of time marked by natural phenomena. (The Week has no basis in nature, though it is of untraceable antiquity and worldwide observance which is difficult to explain apart from the Mosaic account of Creation.)

The day is one rotation of the earth, the month one revolution of the moon around the earth, and the year one revolution of the earth around the sun. These are all arrangements of divine power and wisdom for the good of the inhabitants of the earth. They were all marked by perpetual ordinances.

On the first day of each month was to be offered a Burnt offering of two bullocks, one ram, and seven lambs. We might pause a moment on the significance of this, for the same combination is enjoined for the Passover and the Firstfruits.

The Burnt offering, we have seen, is an offering in recognition of sin nature and its consequences, and the need for redemption from it. Therefore the consumption of these animals by fire is the swallowing up or overcoming or renunciation of that nature.

The animals, then, must represent that human or sinful element. And, as distinct from each other, the different animals must represent certain aspects of it. So much is clear.

THE BULLOCKS

Now, considering its use in Scripture generally, the Bullock seems to represent Flesh, as distinguished from Spirit—the natural, animal, human element.

To David, the "*men of this world*" are the "*fat bulls of Bashan*." The transition from ox to cherub in the successive appearances of Ezekiel's "Living Creatures" (Eze. 1:10 and 10:14) seems to indicate the transition from flesh to spirit nature of the Camp of the Saints thus represented.

Perhaps the Two bullocks represent the broad twofold division of that flesh, Jew and Gentile, which distinction disappears when the bullock-flesh is consumed by the Spirit-fire.

THE RAM

The ram, as distinguished from the bullock, would seem to indicate human Power and Assertion and Ambition. It is a little difficult to pin down the significances here, but perhaps the distinction will strike us if we imagine the impression we would get from the expressions, "He is like an ox" and "He is like a ram." The first gives a picture of natural grossness and lack of spirituality and finer feeling; the second a picture of driving pugnaciousness and dominance.

THE LAMB OF GOD

The seven lambs present no difficulty. Here in its numerical perfection and completeness is sinless sacrifice of the beloved Lamb of God. This element is never absent from these rites, for without it all would lose their meaning.

A KID OF THE GOATS

With the monthly Burnt offering, a Sin offering was made of a kid of the goats. This apparently was for all imperfections and unintentional disobedience during the month which in perfect justice and for perfect harmony required some recognition.

We see that throughout the sacrificial arrangements, all types of sin were currently taken into account and atoned for, so that nothing should mar their perfect communion with God.

We call to mind the case of Achan, where a sin within the camp of God was not covered in this manner but was concealed by deceit.

It soon became very clear by the reverses they received that all was not well between them and God; and the sin had to be traced down and purged from the camp by the blood of the sinner, before God would dwell with them and prosper them in their way.

God's beautiful laws and provisions would have kept them a pure and holy and ever joyful community, glorying in His love and favor, IF they had faithfully done their part. But they preferred, in their blindness, the empty, cheating, will-of-the-wisp lusts of the flesh that led them only to sorrow and death.

With the monthly service, too, there were Meat and Drink offerings of thanksgiving in their correct proportions. The Drink offering of wine, we may note, (which appears in the Daily, Weekly and Monthly ordinances), is absent from the more solemn annual ceremonies, some of which are identical with the Monthly except in this respect.

Considering the scriptural alliance of wine with gaiety and good cheer, this appears to emphasize the especial solemnity

and dignity of the annual gatherings. A time of rejoicing truly, but a putting aside of the lighter pleasure for the deeper and more wholesome spiritual joy of God's service.

* * *

MOSAIC SACRIFICE

PURPOSE OF SACRIFICE

Recognition of alienation
Desire for reconciliation
Offering for atonement
Foreshadowing Christ

FEATURES COMMON TO ALL

Without blemish
Male (specific exceptions)
Hand on animal's head
Blood: Sprinkle on altar
 Pour at base
Fat burnt on altar

PERIODIC

DAILY

Oil in lamp
Incense
Lamb morning & evening
Burn all night on altar
Meat & drink in proportion

WEEKLY

Double the Daily

MONTHLY

Burnt offering:
 2 bulls, ram, 7 lambs
Sin offering:
 Kid of goats
Meat & drink in proportion

YEARLY

PASSOVER:

Same as monthly for
seven successive days
(But no drink offering)

FIRSTFRUITS:

Same as monthly for 1 day
(But no drink offering)

TABERNACLES:

3 week period (1st-22nd)
Day of Atonement (10th)
Live in booths (15th-21st)

BASIC TYPES

DEDICATION

BURNT

Wholly consumed on altar

THANKSGIVING

MEAT (Cereal)

Flour and oil
Must have: Frankincense
 Salt
No leaven or honey

DRINK

Wine

PEACE

Male or female
Fat burnt on altar
Priest: Breast & Shoulder
Offerer eat rest same day

EXPIATION

SIN (Ignorance)

PRIEST or CONGREGATION:

Bullock
Blood into Tabernacle
Fat burnt on altar
Rest burnt without camp
None eaten by priests

RULER:

Male goat
Blood usual manner
Fat burnt on altar
Rest eaten by priests

ONE OF THE PEOPLE:

Female goat
Rest same as ruler
(If poor, bird or flour)

TRESPASS (Knowing)

Ram
Fat burnt on altar
Rest eaten by priests
Restore plus 1/5 value

* * *

The Three Yearly Sacrifices

After the monthly came the three yearly convocations for sacrifice. These are: The *Passover* in the first month, the *First-*

fruits in the third, and the *Tabernacle* in the seventh concluding the agricultural season.

During the Passover, the Monthly Burnt, Sin and Meat offerings were made for seven successive days. On the day of Firstfruits the same were repeated once. The Feast of Tabernacles was very elaborate, extending over the greater part of the seventh month, with the sacrifices varying from day to day.

The particular significance of the ordinances of these feasts is another very interesting and instructive subject of study.

* * *

We have seen how the sacrifices were not mere rituals or meaningless forms or primitive rites of man's invention, but a benevolent, deeply symbolic and intricately woven institution designed by an all-wise Omnipotence to meet the needs of every phase of Israel's spiritual life.

They were an avenue of approach for forgiveness and reconciliation, a concrete expression of gratitude and thanksgiving, a source of strength and comfort and guidance, a continual reminder of their favored position, and a tangible link with their Creator.

Truly the provision of a tender and loving Father, Who careth for His children and desireth not that any should perish but that all should grow up unto Him strong and wise in righteousness and truth.

Strength and Weakness

Human nature is a curious compound. Samson's life is a strange contrast in strength and weakness. Then the apostle Paul had an infirmity in his flesh which, to his mind, detracted from his effectiveness in preaching the Gospel. Several times he besought God to remove it from him. God finally said—

"My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9).

When Paul understood this, he could say—

"When I am weak, then am I strong" (2 Cor. 12:10).

Natural power, ability or favourable circumstances are nothing to the Spirit of God. All natural ideas are backward.

"That which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God" (Lk. 16:15).

"God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty" (1 Cor. 1:27).

Why? The Scriptures give us the clear answer—

"That no flesh should glory."

Any glorification of the flesh is false and abominable to God. Moses forgot this great principle just for a moment and under great pressure. In consequence, he was cut off from entrance to the promised land as a standing example to all following ages.

All the world's institutions are based on false beautification and glorification of the flesh. Therefore they reject the true Christ.

"His visage was marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men. He hath no form nor comeliness, no beauty that we should desire him" (Isa. 52:14; 53:2).

There was in Him no appeal to the flesh. He was and is despised and rejected. The flesh hates the principles He typifies and enunciates.

So with God's great ambassador to the Gentiles—

"His bodily presence is weak and his speech of no account" (2 Cor. 10:10, R.V.).

Again, why? And the Scriptures answer—so that the power and glory and influence should be with the message and not with the messenger (1 Cor. 2:3-5).

The principle is clearly enunciated in the case of the Immerser—

“What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Verily, they that wear soft raiment, and live delicately, are in king’s houses” (Matt. 11:8).

John dwelt in the wilderness, clothed with skins, and eating the meager fare of the desert, and all who would be with him must go out unto him—Matthew 11. The Gospel message is a call to come out—not go in!

Strength is made perfect in weakness—in mortification, in humiliation, in simplicity. Never in glorification, or exaltation of the motions of the flesh, or vain show, or false appearances. As soon as we begin to glorify the flesh, we immediately lose contact with the power of God.

“Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time” (1 Pet. 5:6).

Mortification of the flesh and glorification of the flesh cannot exist together—they are mutually antagonistic. One will surely destroy the other.

Samson is only mentioned once outside of Judges, but that one mention is vitally important to the true picture for it tells us two things: that Samson was a man of faith and, second, that he obtained a good report. Apart from this, apparently so casual reference, the life of Samson would appear to be a tragedy of weakness.

Samson, like David, was a true man of God at heart, but he had to learn wisdom by great suffering and humiliation. He was trained in the hard bitter school of everyday life.

His name is listed in the divine roll of honour of the outstanding faithful—Hebrews 11. We are glad to learn that his great strength was a result of his intense faith—not merely the self-pleasing vanity of a capricious giant. A careful examination of the record will confirm this view—Judges 15.

Here we see Samson in the same light as David before Goliath. All Judah was in abject fear of the Philistines—so much so that they came to bind Samson, their God-given judge, to deliver him to the Philistines to appease them for the sake of shameful peace!

Samson permitted himself to be bound and delivered. Then, we read—

“And when he came to Lehi, the Philistines shouted against him. And the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, and the cords that were upon his arms became as flax that was burnt with fire, and his bands loosed from off his hands” (Jdgs. 15:14).

The clear meaning surely is that he permitted himself to be bound and delivered in *faith* that the Spirit of God would come upon him when needed.

Following this, he judged and defended Israel twenty years. Then, at the end of this long and faithful service, he joined himself to a woman of the world, who could not rest until she had broken down the sacred bond of faith and obedience between him and God, and sold him in shame to his enemies. His punishment for this lapse of his lifelong vows was very great. The Philistines put out his eyes and used him for sport in the worship of their idol Dagon.

But, says Paul, he died in faith—having learned wisdom by suffering. Out of weakness he was made strong by faith. The loss of his natural vision opened the eyes of his understanding and in his death wrought the overthrow of the temple of the ungodly.

Paul's own experience was similar. He, too, was blinded that he might see. He, too, was reviled, despised, buffeted, and set forth as a spectacle to the world, yet, in his humiliation and death, he pulled down the strongholds of wickedness.

But Jesus himself is the pre-eminent example of dying in a public spectacle of shame, yet in death destroying his destroyers and delivering his people. All the great men of the Philistines were destroyed in Samson's death, and the Philistines did not bother Israel again for many years.

The lesson of Samson is clear. It is the lesson of Adam. Adam was not deceived, but persuaded. Samson was worn down by continual contention until he finally gave in foolishly against his judgment for the sake of peace. The peace never came.

With Samson, it was the lust of the eye and the lust of the flesh. With Hezekiah, later, it was the pride of life. Hezekiah was flattered by the attention of the great king of Babylon, and drawn into exposing himself to the cunning and cupidity of his enemies. God, we are told, was trying him to see what was really in his heart.

This, like Samson was at the end of a worthy and useful life.

What was wrong with Hezekiah showing all his possessions? Why was God's judgment so severe upon so good a man? It is the same lesson man never learns—No flesh should glory. Many times God strikingly demonstrates His utter abhorrence of glorification of the flesh. Sometimes the retribution is slow—sometimes it is terribly sudden. Herod gave not God glory—

“And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, and he was eaten of worms and gave up the spirit” (Acts 12:23).

All glory belongs to God, and He is very jealous. He will disperse glory at the last day to those whom He chooses to honour. Until then, all man’s glorying is vain and abominable. The flesh is so unclean and corrupt that any attempt to glorify it is the height of presumption before God. How man loves to bedeck and glorify his vile body, and to parade his possessions, purchased through unfaithful stewardship of his Lord’s goods!

“But ye have not so learned Christ, if so be ye have been taught of him” (Eph. 4:20, 21).

The mortification and humiliation of the flesh is the low, small gateway into the Kingdom of God—never pomp and show.

Hezekiah was a very good king. He had great zeal, for he rooted out all idol worship in the land. He had much faith, for he stood up against the mighty host of Assyria, when all nations were falling before it. And he was very careful to be obedient to all God’s commands. These fine points in his career are illustrated in 2 Kings 18.

“He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan. He trusted in the Lord God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him. For he clave to the Lord, and departed not from following him, but kept his commandments, which the Lord commanded Moses. And the Lord was with him; and he prospered whithersoever he went forth: and he rebelled against the king of Assyria, and served him not” (vs. 4-7).

He was the greatest of all the kings of Judah. And God worked on his behalf one of the greatest deliverances recorded in Scripture. The most powerful nation on earth, Assyria, came to destroy Judah in its sweeping march of conquest. Hezekiah put his faith in God, and defied the Assyrians (2 Chr. 32).

“And for this cause Hezekiah the king, and the prophet Isaiah the son of Amos, prayed and cried to heaven. And the Lord sent an angel, which cut off all the mighty men of valour, and the leaders and captains in the camp of the king of Assyria. So he returned with shame of face to his own land. And when he was come into the house of his god, they that came forth of his own bowels slew

him there with the sword. Thus the Lord saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib the king of Assyria, and from the hand of all other, and guided them on every side. And many brought gifts unto the Lord to Jerusalem, and presents to Hezekiah king of Judah: so that he was magnified in the sight of all nations from thenceforth” (vs. 20-23).

A glorious reign, with a fitting climax. A mighty delivery in the sight of all nations, so that all nations sought his favour.

“In those days Hezekiah was sick to the death, and prayed unto the Lord: and He spake unto him, and He gave him a sign.”

Turning back to the record in 2 Kings 20, we read—

“In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And the prophet Isaiah the son of Amos came to him, and said unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live” (v. 1).

God said he had done well. The time had come for him to rest. He was forty years old. He had a good record and God was willing to terminate his period of trial and probation.

“The righteous man is taken away from the evil to come” (Isa. 57:1).

But Hezekiah was not ready, and he prayed to God to live. In this, he questioned the wisdom of God, and rejected His merciful rest. Having failed in this test, his life was lengthened for further testing and trial. Continuing, there is evidence that a declension had in part set in, and the king's character was seen in a less favourable aspect.

“But Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him; for his heart was lifted up: therefore there was wrath upon him, and upon Judah and Jerusalem” (2 Chr. 32:25).

“Howbeit in the business of the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, who sent unto him to enquire of the wonder that was done in the land, God left him, to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart” (v. 31).

In his pride he showed off all his possessions and glory to the ambassadors from Babylon. There was not a thing that he failed to display. Humility and prudence were alike forgotten. God directly connects this incident with the later carrying away of all these treasures into Babylon, as cause and effect (Isa. 39: 1-6).

Here was Judah's first dealing with Babylon. The Babylonians get a full catalogue of all their possessions, and see Judah as

a small country with much wealth. This incident sowed the seed for later conquest and plunder. Instead of being permanently impressed with the power and terror of God—the consideration that first caused them to send the ambassadors—they find a foolish little king wrapped up in his own glory and vainly displaying his treasures, and the glory and power of God—Hezekiah's real treasure—is forgotten.

The prophet Isaiah is sent to rebuke him, and tell him the consequences of his foolishness. And Hezekiah answers—

“Good is the word of the Lord which thou hast spoken”
(2 Kgs. 20:19).

He recognized and accepted the justice of God's condemnation.

Going back again, in 2 Chronicles 32—

“Notwithstanding Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of the Lord came not upon them in the days of Hezekiah” (v. 26).

We here see the real and true Hezekiah emerging from the crucible of test.

“He said, moreover, for there shall be peace and truth in my days” (Isa. 39:8).

Not just peace, but peace *and* truth. He recognized their relationship. He determined, henceforth, as long as *he* lived, that the evil should be averted and peace prolonged by a rigid and well-pleasing conformity to God's way of truth. Here is true humility and repentance. *“So the wrath of God came not upon them in the days of Hezekiah.”* Hezekiah, like Samson, finally triumphed over himself.

There is one character in the New Testament to whom our minds particularly go when we think of strength out of weakness and success out of failure. That is Peter.

“This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance” (2 Pet. 3:1).

No matter how pure minds may be—that is, no matter how thoroughly they have freed themselves from worldly things, they still need constant stirring up to remembrance. Here is the wisdom of constant reading of the Word.

God Himself is a great Remembrancer. He forgets nothing except that which He wills in mercy to forget. The Scriptures contain many exhortations to remembrance. Forgetfulness is one of the greatest enemies of the spiritual mind in the present

day of weakness. The Apostle speaks of those who get all worked up with zeal and determination—then straightway go and forget. *“Keeping in memory”* is the distinguishing mark between a substantial and a superficial faith (Jam. 1).

All flesh truly is weak and forgetful, but it will be noticed that memory generally follows the line of interest, and the things people love, those things they remember. Notice the class of things people remember and discuss without difficulty. It is a good index to their heart and mind.

Three things combat forgetfulness—search the Scriptures daily, exhort one another daily, and *“forsake not the assembling of yourselves together”* but *“do this in remembrance of Me.”*

Any who neglect these salutary admonitions court disaster. This principle, like other scriptural principles, works both ways. It is recorded that God keeps a book of remembrance for those who remember Him, and talk often together about Him (Mal. 3:16).

“There shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of His coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the Creation” (2 Pet. 3:3, 4).

One of the greatest and most recent signs of the times is the significant fact that the day of the scoffer is nearly over. Things no longer remain the same, and few are left that would pretend they do. People now rather look with fear of heart upon the dark shadows of the things that are coming to pass on the earth.

The destruction of heaven and earth is now no longer a lightly ridiculed fancy—it is becoming a common dread. The scoffer is ceasing to scoff, and beginning to tremble. Peter’s prophecy is now revealed in all its naked truth. Today the world gasps.

“Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness” (2 Pet. 3:11).

What is the connection? The exhortation gets its point from the fact that all that is *not* holy and godly will share in the universal destruction. Only the things that cannot be shaken will remain.

“Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless” (v. 14).

How exacting is this demand for diligence. Webster defines diligence as “careful attention, persevering, application”; but

the concordances show that the original word carries the idea of haste, dispatch and promptness. It is the word used when Mary is said to go to the hill country with *haste* (Lk. 1:39). The underlying thought is that there is no time to lose. Do this *first*. Give it *first* attention as the most pressing consideration. Jesus said—

“Seek ye FIRST the kingdom of God” (Matt. 6:33).

And Paul—

“Do it NOW, while it is yet called today, for the night comes quickly, and tomorrow will be too late.”

“Without spot and blameless” (2 Pet. 3:14).

We speak of high standards. Here is something we are told to labour diligently for. It may be said we cannot be perfect. That is beside the point. Let us concentrate our attention upon the positive, constructive aspect—what we can do in this direction of perfection, towards attaining to that divinely set standard.

“Without spot.” A spot is a very small thing—quite insignificant, we would say, in comparison with the whole. But one small dirty spot on an otherwise spotless white garment can be very noticeable and very embarrassing. The Spirit, through Solomon, records (Ecc. 10:1)—

“Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour: so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour.”

God will not accept a stinking savour. Let us be careful we do not offer Him one by permitting small spots to appear.

What are these little spots composed of? Jude says: *“Hating even the garment spotted by the flesh”* (1:23). And James: *“Keep unspotted from the world”* (1:27). The flesh and the world. The flesh is that part of the world that is in our own members: the world is the whole aggregate of the mind and activities of the flesh that is outside ourselves.

Paul says that Christ loved the church and gave His life for it, so that He might be able to offer it without spot unto God, and the way Paul says He was to cleanse it was by the washing of the Word. The Word will remove the spots if we humbly seek guidance from it with a sincere mind (Eph. 5:26).

“Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness”
(2 Pet. 3:17).

The world lieth in wickedness. Therefore the *“errors of the wicked”* are the *“customs of the world.”* Our steadfastness consists in maintaining our spotlessness from them.

"But grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (v. 18).

Grace and knowledge are mutually essential. Neither can truly exist without the other. Grace is a word that is difficult to define. It is the harmoniously balanced sum total of many virtues. It is a definition of the godly character in all its relations.

It is, in the original, derived from the root word meaning "joy, gladness, rejoicing." It is very closely related to the words of Jesus—

"These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy may be full" (Jn. 15:11).

A life built around this principle, and always in harmony with it in all associations with God and with man is a life of grace.

A few examples will help define grace as scripturally used. The original word is *charis*.

"If ye love them which love you, what CHARIS have you? If ye do good to them which do good to you, what grace have you? Even sinners do that much" (Lk. 6:32-33).

"For THIS is CHARIS (grace), if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? But if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is GRACE with God" (1 Pet. 2:19, 20).

So writes Peter by the direction of the Spirit.

"It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace" (Heb. 13:9).

—that is settled and grounded on an inward unshakable joy and peace that leads it to act in a spiritual and godly manner in all circumstances.

To grow in grace and knowledge is to take firmer and deeper root in divine things, so that the disposition and viewpoint is less and less affected by outward things, and the conduct more and more truly motivated by spiritual perception and discernment.

These closing words of Peter's epistle define the whole purpose of our present existence. The success or failure of our life will be measured in relation to this one consideration—how far we have, through faith, transformed our fleshly weakness into spiritual strength, and to what extent we have grown in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.

The Man After God's Own Heart

“. . . Let us fall now into the hand of the Lord; for His mercies are great; and let me not fall into the hand of man” (2 Sam. 24:14).

Our thoughts this morning concern sin. The present is the dispensation of sin. Anything contrary to God's will, or 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 2 Samuel 24. It tells us of David's sin in numbering Israel. Why was it sin to take a census? Because it was of the flesh, and contrary to the will of God. Inevitably our minds turn to that more dreadful sin that cast a great shadow over David's life and posterity.

“God moved David to number Israel” (24:1).

There is much to be learned from this. God did not tempt David, or move him against his own inclination. How then did He “move” him to do what otherwise he probably 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 contrive that we 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 in an appropriate way.

If we choose evil, 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 till it nauseated them and caused a plague and thousands died. And the name of that 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 and often destruction.

There is no more fitting punishment than to be forced to accept in full and sickening overabundance that which we just planned to dabble lightly with and then pull back.

How often children think they are deceiving us by their all too transparent little subterfuges that countless children have tried countless times before. And we think we can do the same

to God! *“As a man sows, so shall he reap”* is the inexorable decree of omniscience and omnipotence. If only we had the plain, simple common sense to *really* believe it—

“As a man sows, so shall he reap” (Gal. 6:7).

Every single act comes back for good or ill, whatever it may be.

If we have any part in God’s purpose at all, then whatever we do wrong be it large or small, we shall pay for it in some very unpleasant and appropriate way—usually, as we see in the case of David, in the way that hurts us most, and that mocks us with our sin.

If we are fortunate, and if God has patience, and sees something in us worth working with, the punishment will be in this life, like David’s. If we appear to escape punishment in this life, then woe betide us indeed—it is reserved for the judgment seat of Christ.

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 purpose of God.

The scene of plague and death 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. David, in thanksgiving, and for an atoning sacrifice of reconciliation, bought the burnt offering and God answered by fire from heaven, and the plague was stayed.

This, by divine providence, happened to be on Mt. Moriah where Abraham had offered Isaac, where the Temple was later built, and finally where the one great sacrificial offering for all time for the raging plague of sin and death was made in the fulness of the appointed time of God’s wisdom and purpose, when 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—

“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” (2 Chr. 3:1).

—same pattern—divine good out of 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 is that we "just cannot understand how David could do such a thing." Whenever there is anything in Scripture that we "cannot understand," it should flash a warning—*Why* cannot we understand? Where have we failed in preparing ourselves to understand? Are we unconsciously assuming that we are able to understand everything that is understandable?

Paul 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 up-building, and their deeper, richer communion together, but they were utterly incapable of comprehending them.

Because of spiritual slothfulness they were dull of understanding. They were mentally retarded in spiritual things. And it was not their misfortune it was their fault, because they had not *applied* themselves to spiritual growth.

Our natural 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.

If we understood sin and human nature as God understands it, we could clearly understand all instances of sin. When we say we "cannot understand" how David could do what he did, we are unconsciously setting ourselves—our capacity of discernment—as the standard, as if our minds were the ultimate in judgment. We do this in many things. God tells us that there are far higher mental powers than ours.

We must realize that there are very real limits to our physical capacity to understand. We cannot understand how time has no beginning, or space has no end. We have not been given that kind of understanding capacity, no matter how we develop. We have been given sufficient mental capacity to run the race of life successfully, if we follow the rules. That's all we need.

But should our incapacity to comprehend the marvels of beginningless and endless time deter us from the obviously practical wisdom of extracting every drop of value from every moment of time as it so quickly runs through our fingers?

"We just cannot understand how David could do that!" This is usually a moral judgment also. Translated into what we 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. That's just a back-handed way of giving ourselves a boost. It's unconscious self-glorification.

Perhaps it would be more profitable to turn the light inward upon ourselves: Why cannot we understand how human beings can grievously stumble? Are *we* so perfect?

We should have *no difficulty* in understanding how *any* sin or weakness could occur, except for constant vigilance and prayer. Our difficulty—our marvel—should be to understand the greatness of God's mercy and patience and love toward constantly erring man.

The more we understand the Word, the more we understand its message of sin and righteousness, of death and life, 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 Elijah should flee for his life; why the great John the Baptist should question and doubt; why James and John should seek preeminence; 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 and desirability in God's sight.

We cannot begin to compare ourselves with Job and David—these men were 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 necessary suffering—and the greater the resultant beauty of the vessel prepared 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 sin's mighty power and terrible evil.

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 tremendous accomplishments for God of war and government and music and praise, he could almost be entitled to feel that he had earned his 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 before the huge man of flesh. And from that point on he had served God with 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 the natural depravity of the human heart, and 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 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 served, then his great public honor and recognition by God—he could well feel natural confidence, even complacency. He could easily be tempted to relax his guard against the 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.

The 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" (Psa. 51:3).

"The sword shall never depart from thine house" (2 Sam. 12:10).

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" (Matt. 26:40)—

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 the sin of David 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—

"He to whom much is forgiven, the same loveth much"
(Lk. 7:42, 43).

We shall then more and more understand how it could happen to such a man, and we shall feel a deep fellow feeling 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, much the reverse. We shall more and more realize its terrible, destructive evil; we shall recognize it more and more as the great common, implacable enemy of us all, and shall perceive that if a man is sincerely struggling against it, only God can judge the seriousness of his failures, and the extent of his successes, and the more concerned and anxious we shall be, by prayer and study, to fortify *ourselves* against sin—

"Watch and pray, lest YE enter into temptation" (Mk. 14:38).

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.

The depth 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 excuses, and self-justification, when pointed out, can reveal a far more sordid and poverty-stricken state of heart than a great failure—stumbled into, or committed under pressure—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, we cannot 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 intent of going as far as 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 a foolish playing with fire, rather than the deliberate premeditated commission of a vile 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 a self-justifying concept of the sordid sequence of events that followed, as he struggled to break out of the net that was tightening on 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 David 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 degree of justification for him so doing, though we have no specific 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. 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 unerringly 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.*"

David was a giant: one of the few really great men of all history. He was great in both strength and in sweetness: in physical courage, and in spiritual discernment, poetry, music and psalms.

David is the Psalms, and the Psalms are David. Truly they are prophetically and inspirationally the mind of the Spirit of Christ, but David's own heart and mind were the Spirit's chosen medium of their expression.

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 God in Israel.

He found that worship broken down, scattered, almost non-existent: the neglected Tabernacle in one place, the forgotten Ark in another.

He left it firmly reestablished and thoroughly arranged in careful, organized depth and detail: with a numerous and orderly course of priests, singers and Levites, the Ark brought to Jerusalem, a magnificent Temple completely planned and designed, and a vast wealth of materials for it assembled. It would have been built if God had permitted him.

The spirit of David was the spirit of song: of praise, worship, thanksgiving, supplication, prayer, adoration. This was his greatest gift to his own generation and to all subsequent generations of the sons of God.

The Psalms of David have been the cherished hymnal of God's people from that day to this, for three thousand years, and they will doubtless accompany them into the endless future.

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 supplications, 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. 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 Temple and the worship and the 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 great 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, 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—

"My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God" (Psa. 84:2).

"My soul thirsteth for Thee: my flesh longeth for Thee" (Psa. 63:1).

"One thing have I desired, that I may behold the beauty of the Lord" (Psa. 27:4).

David's sin manifests the wise and loving working of God—both in punishment and in mercy. For His people, God always combines punishment with hope and reconciliation. God loved Solomon. God called him Jedidiah, "*Beloved of Yahweh*" — same root as David, "*Beloved.*" Why did God make choice of Solomon for the direct line of Christ, for all succeeding generations to marvel at?

We would think it much more in keeping with the principles of holiness to carefully avoid any connection with this questionable union, rooted in sin and lust, and stained with adultery and murder, and rather, to choose the heir for the direct line of Christ from one of David's legitimate and faithfully-acquired wives.

Certainly God had a deep purpose and lesson for us in it. And certainly it was not to condone or belittle the dreadfulness of David's sin. Perhaps it was another beautiful illustration of the divine principle that if there is true repentance, God will bring good out of evil, after there has been appropriate punishment,

faithfully submitted to. When God must punish heavily He compensates. Contrast the two children of David and 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—Jedidiah.

Would it not be to show the fulness of God's forgiveness—the fulness 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 upon earth that I desire before Thee"
(Psa. 73:25).

The especial choice and favoring of Solomon would be a gracious and greatly needed gesture of love from God that reconciliation was complete.

As the wise woman of Tekoah said to David, in words that—like those of 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" (2 Sam. 14:14).

God hath, in His love, devised the means, and we meet this morning in commemoration of it. Let us ever thank Him for it—thank Him with the offering He asks—a living sacrifice.

There Must Be Heresies

"Thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but do them not" (Eze. 33:32).

In the first reading for this morning (2 Kgs. 24 and 25) we are at the end of the major epoch in the great plan of God—a time when things that had seemed unchangeable began to crumble and fall.

Such times call for deep foundations. Lives grounded merely upon the upper layers of immediate fact cannot stand the shock of these periods of earth shaking transition.

Within the Household of God, the present time is of a similar nature.

The old landmarks are disappearing. Rifts are developing where solid rock was expected, and every individual is forced again and again to examine his own foundations to see whether they are still firm and unchanged, or whether they turn out to have been built upon what had only the appearance of stability.

Paul said to the Corinthians—

"There must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you" (1 Cor. 11:19).

Mere membership is meaningless. Each must stand upon a firm foundation of intelligent belief and perception, cemented by constant study. Vital decisions are being forced upon us. Only a daily and affectionate familiarity with the Word will make us ready for them. Those that are not ready will be weeded out and left behind.

"THERE MUST BE ALSO HERESIES AMONG YOU, THAT THEY WHICH ARE APPROVED MAY BE MADE MANIFEST AMONG YOU."

After the storm has passed, some houses will be left standing—some will have been swept away. It is hard, but it is necessary. The stones of the Temple must be sound and solid. In battle training, real bullets are used. A false move means death, even in the training period. It is hard, but it is necessary. Facts are always hard, but wisdom will face them.

* * *

The end of Israel's kingdom is a sad consideration. Not particularly because of the immediate circumstances and

individuals concerned, but because of what lay behind, because of the great underlying tragedy that was involved.

Our minds go back to the beginning. To the glorious blazing mountain, enveloped in cloud and smoke, and rocked with thunder—to Moses, the man of God—to the commandments and the Covenant. Then to Solomon at the dedication of the Temple—the House filled with the glory of God—the nationwide dedication and rejoicing.

Wonderful beginnings!—so full of possibility and promise!

But now this is the end. The Temple plundered . . . the city burned . . . the leaders slain . . . the people scattered.

Why? Because the pull and example of the world had overcome the influence of God's law and institutions. They never thoroughly grasped the superiority of God's way, nor the necessity for their own well-being of following it.

To them it was always a burden—a meaningless restriction upon their natural desires. They never perceived its spirit and purpose, so the day of judgment came upon them unawares. They had never really come out of the world.

The clouds of judgment were gathering for a long period, but they were unheeded. The great fallacy that prevented them from discerning the ominous trend of events was their dependence upon Egypt as the basic stability of the times.

Stretching far back in the dim past, Egypt had always seemed vast, solid and immovable. The world revolved around Egypt, and Egypt was their friend. These upstarts from the East, Assyria and Babylon, would soon pass away. Egypt would arouse, gather her strength, and crush them.

But history had reached a turning-point. Something deeper than dependence upon Egypt was going to be necessary to carry them through this time.

Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, all the prophets repeatedly urge the children of Israel to lay a deeper foundation than upon the fleshly arm of Egypt. But allegiance to Egypt appealed to them more than allegiance to God because their ways were more in keeping with the ways of Egypt.

Egypt offered them insurance, and God offered them insurance, but Egypt's requirements were less exacting and more pleasing to the flesh and more assuring to the natural eye.

The economic system that God had set up under the Law of Moses was entirely different from the selfish way that natural man carries on his business. If they were to depend on God,

they would have to do what God wanted and live the way He commanded. They would have to give up a lot of things that were very desirable to the natural man.

The Law of Moses prevented the accumulation of great wealth and the development of a class of exploited workers. It was aimed at general national well-being and equality, rather than personal ambition and advancement.

They had long since forsaken all these principles. They had built up a system of caste and oppression. They had patterned themselves in all things according to the heathen who surrounded them. The rich oppressed the poor; and the Lord's inheritance, which was given impartially to all, was seized by the stronger who trod down the weak.

Born with superior ability, or favored by superior opportunity, by some perverse twist of logic they came to feel that they were entitled also to superior prosperity, and that the less favored and less fortunate were fair game, provided they kept an appearance of legality.

They forgot that all that they had was of God, and given to be used solely for God's purposes. They forgot that their possessions and abilities were not a favor from God to be squandered on selfishness, but a responsibility and stewardship.

This is how the heathen have always done. It is the way of the world. God gave them a law designed to develop unselfishness, generosity, consideration for others, and disregard of personal advancement. They were not to glean their fields or orchards; they were to be openhanded; they were to lend freely without interest. They were taught that all was from God and intended for the general good and not personal aggrandisement.

They were above all not to make profit out of the position of others less fortunate.

Such were the self-destructive abominations of the heathen. He had showed them a better way—burdens mutually borne and joys mutually enjoyed.

The natural way has the great advantage of being the natural way. It takes no effort, no patient investigation, no tiresome self-analysis and burdensome self-discipline, no stepping out of line and opposing the majority. Relax the efforts and it immediately asserts itself. And it is always SO reasonable—to the natural mind.

God's purpose was that the Jews should be a witness to the world of a community operating according to the divine Way, to

demonstrate that Way's infinite superiority to those who had eyes to see. HE HAS THE SAME PURPOSE TODAY.

But the great lament throughout all their history was that they had no mind or attention for the way of God. They would not rise above the natural level of vicious selfishness and greed. Again and again they were forcibly raised above that level—the way of God was forcibly thrust upon their consciousness, but they fought it bitterly, and settled back as soon as the pressure was released.

And so the judgment descended on them, and the privileged classes were destroyed or removed to Babylon, and Palestine was given to the poor of the land to be vinedressers and husbandmen, and the Kingdom of the Lord came to an end.

And yet, even those that were left in the land still clung to the empty shell of Egypt—and went down to ruin with her soon after.

* * *

The reading from Ezekiel (ch. 9) is from the same time in Israel's history. Ezekiel was one of the great historic figures who stood out during this period pointing out the way of wisdom and life.

Like all the rest, his words received little attention. Not that he was ignored. He was politely—even eagerly—listened to, and looked upon as a great prophet from God—but, as God said to him (Eze. 33:32)—

"Thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument:

"For they hear thy words BUT THEY DO THEM NOT."

They listened to him, and solemnly agreed with him, and remarked how sad it was that things had come to such a pass. They doubtless gravely discussed, and lamented, and protested, and deplored.

But it went no further. This effort exhausted all the urgency and vitality of their disquietude, and they drifted along with the rest. They could not see that they were called upon to DO something about it—to courageously take a clear stand for God and for the Truth.

They could not see that this was THEIR hour of decision and destiny—that this was God's test for THEM—

"There MUST be heresies, that the approved may be MADE MANIFEST."

Today's reading from Ezekiel is a bitter denunciation of the prophets who said "Peace," when there was no peace. Those who smoothed over the problems and soothed the people, instead of stirring them up to the ever-present dangers of complacency.

Soft, flattering words that "All is well" always grate upon the ears of wisdom, for there is never any justification for relaxed vigilance or for the pleasant indulgence of self-satisfaction—

"Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12).

"When you have done all things commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants" (Lk. 17:10).

"If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" (1 Pet. 4:18).

Such is always the trend of scriptural admonition. The reward is within everyone's reach. There is no excuse for defeatism. With God all things are possible, and He delights in strengthening the weak.

But still God is not mocked, and He can see what infinite time and effort we can give *other* things—if we want them badly enough.

In sacrifice, God demanded the best that a man had. A man might be poor, and his best might be but a handful of meal, but it **MUST BE HIS BEST**.

And a man seeking to draw near to God in sincerity and love would be content with doing no less. Anything less than our utmost effort and devotion cheapens the whole transaction and robs it of much of its unique satisfaction and pleasure.

Man is only truly happy when he is using his best possible efforts in the best possible direction—when he is giving his whole heart and soul to the one great thing he believes in.

But it must be free from pride. That is where wisdom comes in to direct. Pride is the delusion of limited minds that do not realize how poor their best really is.

We cannot overcome pride by just concealing it. If we do, it will break out in the repulsive form of false humility. Pride is an inseparable companion of ignorance and limited vision, and it is only cured by enlightenment and a divinely adjusted perspective—

"What is man that Thou are mindful of him?" (Psa. 8:4).

Like Him None Before or After

"A child shall be born to the House of David, Josiah by name, and on this altar shall he offer the priests of the high places" (1 Kgs. 13:2).

JOSIAH: THE FAITHFUL, FORETOLD RESTORER

Josiah was the last good, and the last independent king of Judah. He came to the throne at eight years of age; at sixteen he began to seek God; at twenty he began to totally purge the land of all false worship; at twenty-six he repaired the Temple, the Law was found, and the Great Passover was held; at thirty-nine he died bravely in battle, defending God's land.

He was, in some senses, the best of the kings. Nothing adverse is recorded concerning him. He is presented as having followed a totally obedient, totally zealous course from his earliest youth. We cannot say he was as great as David, but the record we have of him is more pure than David's.

His reign is a fitting and striking ending to the Kingdom that had its true beginning in David. There was Saul before David, as there were four evil men—vassals of foreign powers—after Josiah. But the period from David to Josiah really comprehends the Kingdom.

There is much about Josiah's life and circumstances that is typical of Christ. And, like Christ, he alone of all the kings had his name and work foretold long before his birth (1 Kgs. 13:2).

He began his reign about 640 B.C. In the loving providence of God, a final period of peace and prosperity was given to Israel. Assyria, which had long dominated and oppressed the whole area, was greatly weakened. Josiah was able to freely re-establish his rule over the whole land, right up to Naphtali, the most northern of the tribes (2 Chr. 34:6), and he used the opportunity to totally cleanse the whole land of idolatry and corruption.

The record concerning him is in 2 Kings 22-23 and 2 Chronicles 34-35. We get to his eighteenth year very early in the Kings record 22:3, but Chronicles gives fuller information of the beginning of his reign (2 Chr. 34:3)—

"In his eighth year (he would be 16) he began to seek after the God of David."

We do not know who guided him, or if it was entirely of himself. His grandfather Manasseh—wicked, but later repentant—had died when he was six. His totally wicked father Amon

had died by murder two years later, when Josiah was eight and had the kingdom thrust upon him. Of course others would rule until he came of age. But at sixteen, in his eighth year, he began to seek God. Continuing 2 Chronicles 34:3—

"In his twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem."

He would now be twenty. This would probably be the age at which he was given complete rulership of the kingdom on his own. The prophet Zephaniah prophesied in his reign (Zeph. 1:1), and from the nature of his denunciation and prophecy, it would seem that he prophesied very early in the reign, and was possibly the cause of the course Josiah followed. Jeremiah did not begin his prophetic work until one year after this, in Josiah's thirteenth year (Jer. 1:2).

Verses 4-7 of 2 Chronicles 34 describe a very thorough cleansing, not only of Judah, but also the whole northern kingdom, which Josiah obviously added to his dominions at the withdrawal of Assyria as it weakened—

"Manasseh, Ephraim, even to Naphtali . . . all the land of Israel" (vs. 6-7).

This brings us (v. 8) again to his eighteenth year, indicating that the cleansing process occupied the six years from his twelfth to his eighteenth. We return now to 2 Kings 22:3, to pick up this eighteenth year. We do not know what condition the national worship at the Temple had been in for these six reforming years. Clearly they had already long since cleaned out the idols and corruptions, and doubtless a form of worship was being carried on.

But the Temple, broken down by Manasseh and Amon, had not been repaired. It is apparent too (v. 4) that a fund for repairing it had been for some time underway.

So now (v. 5) the Temple is to be repaired, and especial mention is made of the fact that there was no checking on the expenditures, because the workmen were faithful. This seems to be one of the hints that we find throughout that this reuniting and cleansing of the land, and purifying and rebuilding of the Temple by this most perfect of the kings was typical of the final restoration to come.

In the process of repair (v. 8), the High Priest Hilkiah finds the Book of the Law. Was it the original Book Moses himself wrote, eight hundred years before? From one point of view, it does not seem likely, for when Solomon put the Ark in the Temple, it is pointedly recorded that there was nothing in it except the tables

of stone (1 Kgs. 8:9). However, it is not certain whether the Book was to be put *in* the Ark or *beside* it (Deut. 31:26 R.V.), and they may have been separated later. The Book may have been hidden by faithful priests in the time of wicked kings who sought to destroy the true worship.

And from another point of view, it would be very fitting and forceful if this truly was the original manuscript. The whole reign of this wonderful king seems very significant and symbolic.

Another question is whether this was the *only* copy then available to the rulership, and whether the Law was generally known. It seems certain that it was known of in general. The prophets always show complete familiarity with it. All the people were supposed to teach it diligently to their children (Deut. 11:19). This presupposes general circulation. So there would bound to be copies and parts of copies in various hands, and many quotations in various writings.

Josiah's previous reforms show that he was generally familiar with God's laws. But it seems certain from his stunned reaction to this Book that he had no direct familiarity with a full and authentic text.

There is a strong Jewish tradition that both Manasseh and Amon had made great efforts to stamp out all copies of the Scriptures, and to persecute those that had them, like the Catholic Church in its heyday. And this indeed is exactly what we would expect—especially in the light of Jehoiakim's treatment of Jeremiah's prophecy, and his attempts to seize Jeremiah for writing it (Jer. 36:23-26).

How fitting and how powerfully dramatic if the very manuscript of Moses showed up by Divine Providence at this last bright moment of Israel's history, before the kingdom went into its two thousand five hundred year eclipse!

When parts of it were read to Josiah, he was tremendously moved and shaken. He was an extremely devoted and zealous man. For six years he had been laboring to cleanse the land from everything contrary to the Divine holiness. He would certainly have sought—and so far in vain—for a full, sure text of the Divine Law. And he now hears these ancient, inspired denunciations and dreadful, forewarned punishments of the very things he knows are deeply ingrained in the corrupted nation.

There is a great sense of urgency in his sending (2 Kgs. 22:13) the High Priest to enquire of God. He appears to realize that the

cup of wrath is brimming full, and the threatened wrath about to fall. This gives us a deeper insight into the intense zeal which drove him to cleanse the land so thoroughly. We get the details of that cleansing in chapter 23, and no previous efforts begin to compare with his. He knew how corrupt the nation was. He knew that God's patience had lingered long.

To whom does the *High Priest* go for the Divine word? To Huldah the prophetess! There is great and sad significance here. Where was the Urim and Thummim? The High Priest himself should have been the direct source of Divine communication. Where were Zephaniah and Jeremiah? They had to go to a woman (v. 14).

God had set it up from the beginning that *man* was to take the responsibility, and answer for it. The woman does not come into the governmental and legislative realm unless the man fails. We remember the striking case of the fearless prophetess Deborah, who rallied and saved Israel. Barak wouldn't go to the battle unless she went with him. The man had failed. God that day saved Israel by two women, just as He will save the race through the Woman's Seed, because the man failed.

And that surely is the big lesson here. *Man* had totally failed of his Divine responsibilities, and God must drive that home by instructing him through a woman.

And that woman appears to be the first to announce to the nation that the long-drawn-out day of God's patience was finally ended, and there was no way now of averting the national disaster that Josiah's God-attuned mind had sensed was pending.

But there is a word of comfort for Josiah. He would not see it. He would die in peace, and be gathered to his fathers in honor and respect. He was the last king who was given an honorable burial in the city of God: the last to see peace in the land.

Beginning chapter 23, he called a great assembly of the nation: *all* that could be gotten together, both small and great, and read to them *all* the words of the Book of the Law that had been found. And—just as their forefathers had before Moses—all the people solemnly swore that they would perform the Lord's Word with all their heart and all their soul. And perhaps they even thought they meant it.

Somehow, man has always had the fatal, subconscious assumption that if he *agrees* to do what God requires, that covers the necessities, and he can generally go his natural way on the

whole, trusting God's "mercy" to bridge the gap between commitment and reality. And so it is today.

Most cheerfully agree that "Yes, of course, *that* is what God commands." But "No, He *really* won't actually require us to go to *that* extreme, for hardly anyone ever does—and surely He won't reject us all." Are we guilty of such folly, in spite of and in the light of the Divine record in the past? So Israel reasoned. Meditate upon their tragic two thousand year history.

* * *

Verse 4 of chapter 23 takes us back. This is clear from the fact that verses 4-20 describe in detail what 2 Chronicles 34:3 tells us began in his twelfth year, which was six years before this. These verses appear to be a summary and description of *all* his activities for the cleansing of the land.

They were (23:4) to remove from the Temple everything to do with *Baal* (that was the worship Jezebel and Athaliah introduced from the Sidonians), and everything for the "*grove*" (or more correctly, for "*Asherah*," the goddess of the original Canaanites), and for the *host of heaven* (the worship of sun, moon and stars, which was introduced into Israel by Manasseh, though warned against as early as Deuteronomy).

It will be noted (end of v. 5) that for "planets" the margin has "twelve signs or constellations"—that is, the *Zodiac*: associated with very ancient pagan abominations. This God-denounced superstition still has wide currency, especially among the ignorant. Newspapers still publish "horoscopes" and speak of the "signs" people are born under. God's terrible denunciations on all these pagan corruptions should warn us not to give currency for a moment—not even in lightness—to the slightest flavor of these superstitious things that God hates. It is not a harmless game, but godless corruption and idolatry: whether we so mean it or not.

The priests of paganism, as we see later (v. 20), Josiah slew without mercy. But verses 8-9 deal with the Levitical priests who had professedly led the worship of God, though in an unauthorized way on the high places. Here we have another interesting type, for these were taken to Jerusalem, but degraded from the Altar service, though maintained by the priestly supplies and doubtless put to menial work. (Compare Eze. 44:10-14).

V. 10: "*And he defiled Topheth, in the valley of Hinnom.*"

Here was the beginning of the Gehenna picture. Manasseh had established Molech worship in the valley of Hinnom beside

Jerusalem (2 Chr. 33:6), in which children were passed through fire, and in some instances burned in the fire. It is strange that Manasseh, who was for much of his life the most wicked king of Judah, who introduced every possible abomination, who murdered God's people and tried to stamp out God's worship—

"He did more wickedly than all the Amorites before him, and he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood" (2 Kgs. 21:11-16)

—it is strange that he should finally repent, and that God should accept his repentance and forgive him, and still finally cast off Judah *"because of all Manasseh's abominations"* (2 Kgs. 23:26; 24:3). Human beings are strange creatures. And God's ways are strange: but always right and just. If Manasseh were truly repentant (and he must have been for God to accept him), then the cruel evils that he had done, and the terrible judgments he had brought upon Judah, would be a dreadful, everlasting burden upon him.

Verses 11-12 give more of Manasseh's abominations that Josiah cleansed. Then (v. 13) the places of blasphemous idol-worship that Solomon had built for the false gods of his wives. Solomon: wisdom and privilege such as no man had ever been given—and in his youth he was zealous for God, and God loved him (2 Sam. 12:24-25).

What tragedies of folly and wasted opportunity the Scriptures contain! Do we ponder them sufficiently? Are *we* doing *all* that God requires?—a total "living sacrifice"?—*everything* ruthlessly eliminated that can hinder our total service?

Why did the good kings like Hezekiah leave these abominations of Solomon? Doubtless some tried to obliterate them. But once these things had a historic existence, and a hold on the popular mind, the wicked kings would keep building them back up, as Amon did with all Manasseh's corruptions that Manasseh in his repentance removed. Here is the tragedy of setting a precedent, and giving corruption a foothold.

But Josiah was more persevering and more thorough. Whatever idolatry he broke down, he defiled in such a way that superstition would thereafter avoid the place as a place of worship. There is a type here too in the finality of his thoroughness.

So far, 2 Kings 23:4-14 have paralleled 2 Chronicles 34:4-5. In verse 15 he moves to the northern kingdom, as 2 Chronicles 34:6-7 also tells us. He gave first and special attention to Bethel. We remember, when the ten-tribe kingdom was first

established under Jeroboam, that Bethel was the main center of the new idolatry: calf-worship (1 Kgs. 12:32-33). And a prophet came from Judah and told Jeroboam that a man of the line of David *named Josiah* would slay the idolatrous priests on that altar, and burn men's bones on it (1 Kgs. 13:1-2). That was three hundred years before, and the time had come for its fulfillment. God's purposes work out slowly, but they never fail.

Both at Bethel, and throughout the northern kingdom (vs. 16-19) Josiah slew all the idolatrous priests right on their own altars, and burned men's bones on them: both actions very extreme, unusual and shocking. It was a total, dreadful cleansing of the land by blood, purging out all the leaven.

Zephaniah (1:4-9) appears to represent it as a great sacrifice to God, and a type of the last day judgment. And in a sense, it *was* a sacrifice: for the essence of sacrifice is the purging of the flesh, and if it is not done voluntarily, it will at last be done judicially.

And so, in this terrible—but necessary and righteous—way, the entire land was cleansed and united for its last great recorded act of worship: the great Passover of Josiah's eighteenth year. *He was still only twenty-six.*

Verse 22: *"Surely there was not holden such a Passover from the days of the Judges, nor all the days of the kings of Israel, nor of the kings of Judah."*

There had been a similar cleansing of the land, and a similar Great Passover, under Hezekiah, one hundred years before (2 Chr. 30), just before the northern kingdom had been destroyed by the Assyrians—a final Divine call for them, which they scornfully rejected.

Hezekiah's Passover was more deep and joyous. There is more indication of popular sincerity and enthusiasm and zeal. *Josiah's* was more total and thorough, and there's indication of a broader participation from the north—a more *nationwide* Passover. In Hezekiah's day, most of the north had mocked his invitation to attend.

Of course, in Josiah's day the population of the land was much less, because of the intervening captivities. It was a remnant that was left.

But though Josiah's Passover was the greatest ever held in the Kingdom, and possibly the greatest national Passover ever since its inauguration in Egypt, it was but a hollow form, carried through by the tremendous zeal of this one man. Josiah, having supreme authority, could thoroughly purge out

all the apparatus and outward aspects of idolatry; but even he could not give spiritual life to this debased and corrupted people.

It would appear that Manasseh, with all his abominations and persecutions of the righteous, had merely given the people what they wanted. And so they must suffer for his sins; though he himself repented, and was forgiven. Therefore the record continues (2 Kgs. 23:25-26)—

“And like him (Josiah) was there no king before him, that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses: neither after him arose any like him.

“Notwithstanding, the Lord turned not from the fierceness of His great wrath, wherewith His anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations that Manasseh had provoked Him withal.”

Josiah lived and reigned thirteen more years. We are not told one word about what occurred in them. God is not giving us *history*, as such, but *instruction*; and we must always remember this as we read. We come to the Word for lessons: not the story itself—though the better we get the story, the better we are likely to get the lessons, *if* our mind is right.

Doubtless there were thirteen more great Passovers. There's no indication Josiah slackened his zeal; much the reverse. But we are told nothing.

The next recorded event is his strange and puzzling death in battle, at the age of thirty nine: the only king of Judah to die in battle. The record is given more fully in 2 Chronicles 35, beginning at verse 20. Assyria, which had dominated the Bible lands since the time of Hezekiah, had now declined. Babylon was rising in the East.

Egypt had a new young king, Necho, and he was determined to reestablish Egyptian power up the Mediterranean coast, now that Assyria was gone, and before Babylon got there. So he took his army to the north, to meet the advancing Babylonian forces in the area of Carchemish on the northern Euphrates, for Babylon now controlled that far, and was pushing west.

To get there, Necho had to cross Josiah's land. Josiah went out with an army to stop him. Necho tried to persuade Josiah that he had no quarrel with him, but just wanted to pass through. And he claimed verse 21 that he had God's authority to do so. But Josiah persisted, though his forces would be puny compared to Egypt's. And he was killed in the ensuing battle,

and Judah was defeated, and the Egyptian king and army went on its way to the north to fight the Babylonians.

Was Josiah right or wrong? Necho's claim of divine authority could be dismissed as self-serving heathen lies, except for a strange remark by the inspired historian (2 Chr. 35:22)—

"Josiah hearkened not to the words of Necho FROM THE MOUTH OF GOD!"

Was it a warning from God that he should have heeded? Or did he have a deeper communication from God that led him forward? We remember Paul on the way to Jerusalem, and to divinely-foretold calamity—and how he still pressed on toward his goal—

"Agabus said, Thus saith the Holy Spirit, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles.

"Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? For I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the Name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 21:11-13).

Was Paul right or wrong? Certainly the whole record, and Christ's words to him (as Acts 23:11), would indicate Paul was right, and following a higher call. And so it may have been with Josiah. God does not usually instruct His intimate and faithful servants through the mouth of heathen enemies.

In the Divine Purpose, the time had come for Josiah to be removed. His work was done, his record written in letters of gold. The judgments of God on wicked Judah were overdue, and they did not merit the continued blessing of such a righteous king. It had been promised to Josiah that the calamities would not come while he lived (2 Chr. 34:28).

But Josiah did not know when the evils were due. He would feel it was his duty to defend the land. Hezekiah had been told the same about judgments to come, and peace in his day; and by his faithfulness he had preserved the kingdom, and it had gone on thereafter for another one hundred years.

And Pharaoh's claims about having no designs on Judah, spoken in the same breath, were false, as Josiah doubtless suspected. Necho was going to contest Babylon for control of the whole area.

Josiah may have felt strong reason to hope that, if he stood up to the enemy, God would give him victory as He had to Hezekiah, to carry on his righteous rulership of Israel, now that it was unified, strong, and cleansed. Sennacherib had made

the same claims about being sent by God (Isa. 36:10), and there was a certain amount of truth in the claim. But still God respected Hezekiah's faith, and preserved Jerusalem.

Or perhaps Josiah may have sensed that the time had come to give his life for his people. It was certainly fitting that he should end his life—which had been totally devoted to God's service—in defending the kingdom and people that God had entrusted to his care.

He was obviously courageous, as well as righteous and faithful, for he personally led his troops into battle, disguising himself so he could enter right into the fray (2 Chr. 35:22).

There was great and unparalleled mourning at his death, unlike anything before. It was made a perpetual ordinance in Israel (2 Chr. 35:25), and became proverbial (Zech. 12:11). It appears to have been genuine, and doubtless was.

The shallow-minded people may have realized too late that the glory was gone, and that their national liberty and well-being had died with this wonderful young king whom God had given them in His mercy, and taken away in His wrath.

It was the end of their independence. Thereafter, till the kingdom was destroyed twenty-two years later, they were miserable vassals of foreigners, beginning with this Necho who had killed Josiah, and who took away his son Jehoahaz a prisoner, to die in Egypt.

It is remarkable that such a wicked people should have mourned so sternly righteous a king, who had so ruthlessly stamped out their beloved idolatries and corruptions. But he must have had other qualities than sternness to endear himself to them.

The depth and genuineness of the mourning is testified by its being made the type of the great mourning of Israel at the revelation of Christ to them, and their realization that he is their rejected and crucified Messiah—

"In that day there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem, as the mourning of Hadad-rimmon in the valley of Megiddon" (Zech. 12:11).

They have been mourning ever since Josiah died. He was their last true king. The few who briefly followed him as puppets of Egypt and Babylon were worthless reprobates who took the nation to its ruin.

But the last great mourning to come will end all their mourning, and will usher in their everlasting joy.

The Way of Peace They Know Not

*"In the day when I cried, Thou answeredst me,
and strengthened me with strength
in my soul" (Psa. 138:3).*

There are many sordid and unlovely chapters of Israel's history recorded for our guidance, and as illustrations of the depths of which unlicensed human nature is capable, but there are few more miserable and uselessly evil than the career of Jehoram recorded in 2 Chronicles 21.

His first act was the murder of his own brothers in order to remove any possible rivals for his throne. He then set himself purposely to work evil, after the example of Ahab whose daughter he had married.

Soon Edom revolted against him and broke away, and then Libnah. He compelled Judah to practice the abominations of idolatry, and brought thereby a great plague upon the people. The Philistines and Arabians broke in upon him and took away his wives and his sons and all his treasures.

Before he was forty, God smote him with a loathsome and incurable disease which two years later brought him to a miserable death. The customary memorial rites of respect were pointedly omitted in his burial, and the final words recorded of him are that he *"departed without being desired."*

An eloquent commentary upon the hopelessness and purposelessness of fighting against God and of laying out a course in opposition to Him.

Such a career can lead to nothing but final unhappiness and frustration. This is so well illustrated by this short life-sketch of Jehoram. A picture without a single bright or wholesome ray. A dismal, meaningless life, and nothing to mark his departure but relief.

Much of his wickedness is attributed to the influence of his wife. This woman, Athaliah, was the daughter of Jezebel, who exercised such malignant control over the weak Ahab—Jezebel, the symbol of wickedness and ungodliness. Verse 6—

"And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, like as did the house of Ahab: for he had Ahab's daughter to wife."

The influence of a woman over a man may be tremendous, either for good or evil. It is a power that is unique. Applied in the right direction it can work wonders of transformation, and

the quiet, patient operation of this power for good may be many a woman's crown of salvation. But it is a two-edged sword, and Athaliah portrays the other edge. How important, then, is marriage "*in the Lord*"!

They were a well-matched pair—miserable, vicious and inhuman. Athaliah comes into unsavory prominence after her husband Jehoram's death—

"Forty-two years old was Ahaziah when he began to reign, and he reigned one year in Jerusalem.

"His mother's name also was Athaliah the daughter (granddaughter) of Omri.

"He also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab: for his mother was his counselor to do wickedly" (2 Chr. 22:2-3).

The miserable and untimely end of Jehoram had no sobering effect upon Athaliah. She had gone too far.

Again she appears in the story when Ahaziah is slain by Jehu, whom God raised up to execute judgment upon the wicked rulers of both Israel and Judah. Ahab, her father, has already been slain in battle at Ramoth-Gilead, but the avenging hand of Jehu falls upon her son Ahaziah, her brother Jehoram the king of Israel, and her mother Jezebel. Then (22:10)—

"When Athaliah saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the seed royal of the house of Judah."

These would be her own children and grandchildren. There are no limits to a course of evil, once the restraints of justice and wisdom have been cast away.

For six years she ruled alone over the house of Judah, the sole survivor, with one exception, of her house and family. Then she comes before us for the last time.

One infant son of Ahaziah had been hidden from her murderous designs by Jehoiada the high priest. Feeling that the time is ripe to end Athaliah's wicked usurpation of David's throne, Jehoiada brings the child Joash out of concealment and crowns him king.

Athaliah, taken by surprise, rends her clothes and cries, "Treason" But the uprising had been well-planned, and she finds herself betrayed. "Then"—

"Jehoiada the priest brought out the captains that were set over the host, and said,

"Have her forth of the ranges: and whoso followeth her, let him be slain.

"So they laid hands on her, and when she was come to the entering of the horse gate by the king's house, they slew her there" (2 Chr. 23:14, 15).

* * *

Jehoram and Athaliah—unhappy, lamentable failures, and tragic ends. What would lead them to such a course of life, bringing neither happiness nor peace to themselves or others? Isaiah says (59:7-8)—

"Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood:

"Their thoughts are iniquity; wasting and destruction are in their paths. The way of peace THEY KNOW NOT."

The answer lies in the last phrase, *"The way of peace they know not."* Apart from the knowledge and application of the way of peace, such is all human kind. These extreme examples of viciousness and depravity confront us vividly with the statement of the Spirit through Jeremiah (17:9)—

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?"

This pronouncement may seem rather harsh as we casually view the life of an orderly, "civilized" community. But in such a community there are many restraints that preserve a misleading surface appearance of tranquility.

Remove the artificial restraints of law, custom and the fear of consequences, and irritate the passions a little, and the animal that is in all human beings is immediately apparent, and once it has tasted blood it will go on to incredible excesses of violence and viciousness.

Human nature is basically selfish and vile: until this is realized and confessed, it cannot be combated or controlled. As long as it is glorified, defended or excused, or its evil effects minimized, there's little hope.

Paul fully realized the vital importance of an unreserved acceptance of this basic truth, and the first three chapters of his principal epistle, Romans, are devoted to relentlessly driving this point home, both to Jew and Gentile. His analysis of the flesh is piercing and unvarnished (Rom. 7:18)—

"For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing."

This is the Deceiver of whom he constantly warns us to beware. Of himself he said (1 Cor. 9:27)—

"I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest I should be a castaway."

If he hadn't kept it under, he would have been a castaway. The promise is always *"To him that overcometh,"* and *him only.*

Paul did not plead weakness as an excuse for failure. He knew he was weak, and could of himself do nothing, but he knew too that adequate strength had been promised if his faith would reach out and take hold of it (Phil. 4:13)—

"I can do ALL things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

That was his secret, and that has always been the secret. The faithful men whom Paul lists in his epistle to the Hebrews were not supermen, but they knew the secret of POWER THROUGH FAITH. And so—

"Out of weakness they were made strong" (Heb. 11:34).

Isaiah records (40:29)—

"He giveth power to the faint; to them that have no might He increaseth strength."

David says (Psa. 105:4)—

"Seek the Lord and HIS strength."

"Blessed is the man whose strength is in Thee" (Psa. 84:5).

"The God of Israel is He that giveth strength unto His people" (Psa. 68:35).

"In the day when I cried Thou answeredst me, and strengthened me with strength in my soul" (Psa. 138:3).

This task of subduing the flesh by the power of God is the principal task of life.

Preaching to others must rest upon the foundation of evidence within ourselves. Our primary witness for God is action, not proclamation. It is notable that Jesus chose a light rather than a trumpet as the symbol of our witnessing to the world—

"Ye are the light of the world" (Matt. 5:14).

"Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father in heaven" (verse 16).

He is concerned, we notice, that men should *see* our good works, rather than that they should *hear* our good words. The latter is necessary, but its whole power for good depends upon the former.

These characters, Jehoram and Athaliah, are not recorded because they are exceptional, but because they are typical. They are ordinary human nature operating without restraint and in positions of Power. They illustrate the results of the reactions of the flesh if allowed to dominate the life.

Little sins logically demand bigger ones. If the course of life is in the direction of the flesh, then the degree of evil is but a matter of opportunity and circumstance. If we deceive, we might just as well murder, and we would if we were not afraid of the consequences.

Unkindness, selfishness, inconsiderateness, ill-temper, irritableness are merely undeveloped buds on the selfsame tree that brings forth murders and adulteries and all manner of violence. The one points logically to the other, and only fear draws the line. Paul says—

“Look diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled; lest there be any fornicator or profane person as Esau who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.

“For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears” (Heb. 12:15-17).

That is the point. If *any* “root of bitterness” be permitted to spring up and grow unchecked, we may, like Esau, come to a time when it is found to be too late to change, though we seek it carefully with tears.

We have several examples of God stepping in at a certain point and hardening a man’s heart in a course of evil so that he can no longer return and chastening him with a whip fabricated out of his own sins.

Very often it is those forbidden morsels of meat which men toy with which are found, strangely but quite logically, to be made the very means of punishment.

Israel tempted God and murmured for meat, and they were surfeited with meat until it nauseated them and created a plague that slew them. And the name of the place was called, The Graves of Lust.

In all this, two lessons are clear. The first, that we are free agents, and masters of our own destiny—*up to a point*. And it is God Who determines that point. He sets the time when it is decreed: Too Late.

And the second lesson: Sin is not a matter of degree but of principle. That is why God demands all or nothing. Not of course that He requires perfection, but He requires an uncompromising hostility and distrust of the flesh throughout.

If the principle is sacrificed in even the smallest matters, the whole position is given away. As James reminds us, He that gave the commandment against murder gave also the commandment against respect of persons. To condone any offense is to condone all.

Absolute perfection can never be humanly attained, but must always be aimed at. To make the standard any less is to destroy the standard altogether. To plead weakness is to give the lie to God, Who said, through Christ (2 Cor. 12:9)—

"MY STRENGTH IS SUFFICIENT FOR THEE."

Not A Bone Shall Be Broken

*“The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart;
and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit” (v. 18).*

PSALM THIRTY-FOUR

This psalm, like all psalms, is beautiful, comforting, and instructive. It is filled with interesting and thought-provoking statements by the wisdom of the Spirit. If we could fully absorb in ourselves the spirit of this psalm, fully learn all its wise instructions, and fully conform to all its loving commands—we would be assured of eternal life.

Eternal life, like every other practical activity, is simply a matter of cause and effect, of following certain clear, specific instructions, and getting certain guaranteed results. Truly the mercy and grace of God are very essential ingredients—but these are guaranteed by God’s unchangeable promise *to those who do the right things*.

The key is OBEDIENCE. Do what God says. Take the trouble to find out His will, and *do it*. It’s just that simple. *No one* will make it who doesn’t do this. All the wishing and hoping and praying and good intention in the world is no substitute for simple obedience. And *all* will make it who *do* do this. God has promised.

Verse 1: *“I will bless the Lord at all times: His praise shall continually be in my mouth.”*

We have most of the secret right there. If we *“continually . . . at all times”* fill our hearts and minds and lips with praise of God, it will at one stroke eliminate all complaining, all foolish talking, all unhappiness, all self-pity—all the things that make most people unlovable and unloved. These things of the flesh just cannot exist together with a heart that is full of praise and blessing of God.

It will also, if it is *true* praise, make us continually study and meditate on God’s Word to find out how to better please Him. Praise that is not associated with careful obedience is no praise or pleasure at all to Him, for it is of the flesh and unsanctified.

Praise—continual, at-all-times, heart-outpouring praise—is the only sensible and practical and mature frame of mind. If we do not find ourselves irresistibly overwhelmed by this frame of mind, we have not yet made true contact with divine things. This lack is not a tragedy—unless we are satisfied with it. It is just a sign that we have not yet thought life through, and stud-

ied and prayed and meditated enough. We are too much in the world. We haven't had the great awakening to God that makes all the present seem a meaningless dream.

The one great *Reality* of life—the one great, bright, glorious, ever-shining *FACT*—is that *God is Love*, and that—

“ALL THINGS work together for good to them that love God” (Rom. 8:28).

“Great peace have they that love Thy Law, and NOTHING shall offend them” (Psa. 119:165).

Get this in sharp and clear focus—and everything else fades away. Get this sharp and clear, and continual praise is irresistible.

Verse 2: *“My soul shall make her boast in the Lord.”*

“Boast” here means “grateful exultation, thankful rejoicing, worshipful assurance.” My “soul”—my life, my whole being.

Verse 2: *“The humble shall hear thereof, and be glad.”*

No one lives to himself. We affect all with whom we come in contact, either for good or ill. And at that great last day, we shall have to give account for what our influence has done to others, or *has failed to do*. If we manifest a consistent life of praise and thanksgiving and rejoicing in God, especially in times of sorrow or trial, *“the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad.”* They will be upbuilt and comforted and encouraged to do likewise. They will see the power of faith. Joy breeds joy, and faith breeds faith—

“I rejoiced greatly that I found thy children walking in Truth” (2 Jn. 1:4).

The humble are the only intelligent people—those who see themselves, and all mankind, as nothing; and God as everything: those who see all passing things *as* passing things, even natural life itself. They have no pride, or touchiness, or self-esteem that needs to be built up and catered to. They have no natural ambition or desire. They clearly perceive the emptiness of all lust and worldly pleasure. They are always happy and contented in God. They have no juvenile need for being entertained, or mollified, or pacified.

Verse 3: *“O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His Name together.”*

“With me” and “together” are the thoughts here. Again, no man liveth unto himself. It is easy, and it is selfishly pleasing, to be wrapped up in ourselves and our own little petty day-to-day concerns. But it is not sensible. It is not godly. It is not healthy. It is not spiritual. It is not even *happy*, compared to what real happiness can be.

"The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee"
(1 Cor. 12:21).

The children of God are all members of one another. If they are *not*—if they don't perceive and practice this—then they are not the children of God. It is a glorious communism, a *true* communism, of which the natural man has no conception: one for all, and all for one. It is God's way. It is God's command. The way of selfish and self-seeking individuality leads only to rejection and death.

The true children of God are as inseparable as Siamese twins—with common organs of life and activity; and if we hope for life, we *must* enthusiastically adapt ourselves to this basic reality, for God in His wisdom has ordained it that way—

"We ought not to please ourselves. Let every one please his neighbor for HIS good to edification: FOR EVEN CHRIST PLEASED NOT HIMSELF" (Rom. 15:1-3).

Verse 4: *"I sought the Lord."*

We must seek. We must make a real effort. We must be prepared to put time and labor and *joyful enthusiasm* into the search. We cannot just sit back and take God for granted. He has to be diligently sought for—

"Seek, and ye SHALL find" (Matt. 7:7).

There's no excuse: it's guaranteed. It's entirely up to us.

Where do we seek? There is only one place: *His Word*. There is only one way: with constant, fervent prayer. God says (Jer. 29:13)—

"Ye shall find Me when ye shall search for Me with ALL your heart."

Let us stop, and think, and face this frankly: it has got to be *all*, or we are just wasting our time. We shall never find God until we seek with all our heart, putting everything else away.

Verse 4: *"He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears."*

Not: "He delivered me from all the things I feared." He doesn't do that, for these things are necessary for our character and development. (Of course *that* deliverance will come in the end, when the purpose of these things has been accomplished). But here it's—

"He delivered me from all MY FEARS."

—from the fears themselves. This is a far deeper, far greater blessing. This must come from God. We cannot do it ourselves. How often, from one end of Scripture to the other, do we find the *command* and the assurance, "Fear not"—

"Fear not, Abraham" "Fear not, children of Israel" "Fear not, Daniel"

"Fear not, Jacob" "Fear not, Joshua" "Fear not, Mary"

"Fear not, Moses" "Fear not, Gideon" "Fear not, Paul"

—and so we find, over and over and over throughout the Scripture, right down to the Revelation—

"Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer . . . be faithful unto death" (2:10).

Fear is the great enemy of peace. We must conquer fear: and there is a way, and only one—

"There is no fear in love:

"He that feareth is not made perfect in love:

"Perfect love casteth out fear" (1 Jn. 4:18).

Verse 5: *"They looked unto Him, and were lightened."*

Here, in almost the same words, is what Paul says to the brethren at Corinth (2 Cor. 3:18; 4:6)—

"We all, with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory . . ."

"God, Who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined into our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God IN THE FACE OF JESUS CHRIST."

God is light. There is no other light. All else is darkness. Apart from God, apart from His Light, we are merely groping through life in gross darkness: seeing nothing, understanding nothing: mere bats and moles, mere animals in a black tunnel to oblivion—never comprehending, never enjoying, the splendors and beauties that the divine Light reveals.

There is much food for nourishment and meditation in every verse, but we must pass on to consider the more central and outstanding ones—

Verse 7: *"The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them."*

We do not think enough about this aspect of God's providence. It is related to the casting out of fear. The angels are real—much more real and substantial than we are ourselves, for they are immortal and indestructible, while we are but a passing breath that could be snuffed out in a moment. And they are right here on the earth, among us.

If we are among the children of God, and we hope and pray that we are, then there is an angel watching over each of us continually, and present at all our assemblies.

We remember that Paul instructed according to the Spirit's wisdom—a beautiful type to the mind of the Spirit, but so annoying to the rebellious mind of the flesh—that sisters should wear a special covering in the assemblies of the saints “*because of the angels!*” Herein sisters are especially privileged to typify the glorious Bride of Christ in his presence. Their humility is their glory.

Angels have rarely appeared visibly to men, but throughout the record of Scripture there are enough instances of such appearances to give us much comfort and understanding and strength, if we will meditate upon them.

“*He shall give His angels charge concerning thee*” (Psa. 91:11).

Some, we are reminded, have entertained angels unawares, and we are told to bear this in mind in all our contacts with others. We never know when God is testing us in this respect. Any common incident may be an angelic visitation. It would be tragedy indeed to find at last that we had destroyed our salvation by being unkind and ungracious and ungodly toward an angel of God.

Verse 8: “*O taste and see that the Lord is good!*”

This is surely the key verse of this psalm, and one of the key verses of all Scripture. An actual, practical *demonstration* is infinitely more convincing and conclusive than the strongest and most logical of arguments.

We can prove by reason and Scripture and evidence that God is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him: but how much more simple and satisfying to “*Taste and see!*”

In spiritual things, the “Taste and see” approach has an even greater advantage and importance than in natural things, for the results are divinely controlled, and we are specifically told that only those who *do* obey will be permitted to understand. Only those who “taste” will be allowed to “see.” Jesus said (Jn. 7:17)—

“*If any man will DO His will, he shall KNOW of the doctrine.*”

God does not permit mere speculators and intellectualizers to be convinced and converted. He deliberately blinds them, as we are repeatedly told.

The sad part is that very few—either “in the Truth” or out of it—are willing to give the glorious divine promise of “Taste and see” a full and fair trial. They have various degrees of interest and desire, but they will not accept the whole program.

In natural things it is considered an indication of folly to invest in a major item on which all one's welfare depends, and then not follow—or even bother to learn—the instructions concerning its successful operation.

But in spiritual things, we tend to substitute wishes and hopes and good intentions for careful study and learning of facts. The Bible is a large book. It is a detailed message from God of how to obtain eternal life. It is *all* necessary, or it would not be there.

It *can* make us "*wise unto salvation.*" Studied constantly, it can change us from the natural, ignorant animals we all are to start with, into something useful for God's eternal purpose—something He can joyfully save, and not have to cast sadly away as useless at the last great day of judgment. The rest of this verse says—

"Blessed is the man that trusteth in Him."

If we were asked, "Do you trust in God?" we would say, "Yes, of course." But if the questioner said, "Give some evidence, some proof," what have we to offer? James says (2:17-18)—

"Faith without works is dead . . . I will show you my faith BY MY WORKS."

Paul tells us how men of faith of old time gave proof of their faith.

Noah built an ark on dry land, and preached a hundred and twenty years, to the derision of the wise of the world.

Abraham left his comfortable home (and Ur *was* comfortable in those days), wandered one hundred years as a stranger, offered up his son.

Moses abandoned the wealth and luxury and power of Egypt, and chose affliction with the people of God.

Others were mocked, scourged, beaten, imprisoned, stoned, sawn asunder, "*not accepting deliverance*" all to manifest that they trusted God.

We are not tested to these extremes. But we *are* tested. We are faced with a choice. The fact that we may ignore it, and fail it, does not mean that the test has not come. We are called upon to demonstrate faith and trust by following the course of spiritual wisdom which is folly to the natural man. In its simplest terms, we are just called upon to *obey*.

This doesn't just mean being baptized, and breaking bread, and going to the meetings. It is far more than that—far more searching. The commands of God are many, and have a direct bearing on every act and decision of our lives. It *must* be that

way, for their whole purpose is to transform our mind and nature and character: they *must* therefore affect our every act.

At every step, we must make the conscious decision between the mind of God as revealed in the Scriptures, and the mind of the flesh as we naturally find it in our own thoughts and desires. *This* is the only way godly character can be built up.

Whatever action is taken, whatever decision is made, that is not consciously motivated by a scripturally-enlightened desire to please God, is *sin*, for it is of the natural flesh. "Taste and see" means try *God's* way. Try God's way in *everything* as a complete pattern of life. Put away all the world's selfish, fleshly, God-ignoring "common sense" rules and maxims, and try the Spirit's way—learned by constant, loving, prayerful study of the Word.

We then just may make the marvelous, unearthly discovery that we had never really lived at all before.

Verse 11: "Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord."

It is something that has to be *learned*, and it is a life-time's work to learn it—with ever-increasing depth and understanding. The first instruction is—

Verse 13: "Keep thy tongue from evil."

Keep thy tongue. The Spirit saith (Prov. 10:19)—

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

Even to the dim eye of common sense, this is obvious. Being what we are—weak creatures of flesh—it is inevitable that if we talk a lot, much is bound to be natural and of the flesh, and therefore sin. The Scriptures emphasize nothing more strongly than the absolute necessity of rigidly guarding the tongue, if we hope for life—

"By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Matt. 12:37).

If we find ourselves talking about others, judging and criticizing and condemning others, complaining, finding fault, gossiping about what others do and don't do, should do and shouldn't do, then let us be moved with a terrible fear at our fleshly folly in not bridling our tongue, and seek by the power and help of God to change our ways before it is too late.

"Love believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things, thinketh no evil, suffereth long, and is kind"
(1 Cor. 13:4, 5, 7).

Truly error must be faced, wrong-doing must be confronted, sound fellowship must be maintained. Serious matters cannot

faithfully be ignored. But in this present, sad, stumbling, dark vale of tears, love must of necessity, in our day to day relationships, cover a vast multitude of sins.

Verse 18: *"The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart: and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit."*

A broken heart and a contrite spirit. These are essential qualifications for salvation, so it is urgent that we know what is involved, and how it is accomplished. A "broken heart" is something that must be prepared and offered to God in sacrifice—

"The SACRIFICES of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise" (Psa. 51:17).

A broken heart is not primarily the result of outward affliction and sorrow, though such things can greatly contribute to its development, and therefore Paul says (Acts 14:22)—

"We must through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of God."

Even of Jesus it is said (Heb. 5:8)—

"He LEARNED OBEDIENCE by the things which he SUFFERED."

Jeremiah declares (17:9)—

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked."

This is all of us, in our natural, animal state—

"In me—that is, in my flesh—dwelleth no good thing" (Rom. 7:18).

The deceitfulness of the heart is principally self-deceit, leading us to think we are other than we really are—that salvation is an easy thing we can drift into, instead of agonizing for—that we can serve both God and Mammon—

"Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12).

"When ye have done all, say, We are unprofitable servants" (Lk. 17:10).

What hope then have we if we haven't done all—if we haven't made the utmost effort to serve and obey?—

"If the righteous shall scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" (1 Pet. 4:18).

If we are more concerned with criticizing others than criticizing ourselves, we are being deceived by our wicked heart. The more enlightened and concerned we are about examining and criticizing ourselves, the more we face and recognize our own

shortcomings, then the more kind and charitable we shall be toward others, knowing that—

“With what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged”
(Matt. 7:2).

A broken and a contrite spirit are developed by searching self-examination *by the light of God’s Word*. Without the light of the Word, the search is meaningless, however strenuous and sincere and well-meaning, for then it is just darkness examining darkness. This is the case with all the world’s self-examining and self-analyses, leading to nothing but further confusion. There is only one Light.

The broken heart and contrite spirit that God requires is the repudiation of the foolish will and desires of the flesh, and complete submission to the beauty and wisdom of the will of God—

“Thy will, not mine, be done.”

Verse 19: *“Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the Lord delivereth him out of them all.”*

We are assured (Lam. 3:32-33)—

“The Lord doth not WILLINGLY afflict nor grieve the children of men: Though He cause grief, yet will He have compassion according to the multitude of His mercies.”

That is, He has no pleasure in, nor desire for, the affliction of men. It is simply a *necessary* means to a glorious end, in the development of a broken and purified heart. If we have afflictions, we can be *sure* they are of a loving necessity, and they are probably because our character needs the lesson. Our wisdom is to submit in thanksgiving, and to try to learn the lesson they teach—

“He subjected Creation to vanity, not willingly, but in hope” (Rom. 8:20).

Verse 20: *“He keepeth all his bones: not one of them is broken.”*

The significance of no broken bones is that affliction is so controlled that there is no permanent injury or deformation. We remember that under the Law, whenever in chastisement there was any permanent injury to a bond-servant, the owner had to let him go free, even for just a broken tooth—for he had transgressed the limits of permitted chastisement.

Again under the Law, not a bone of the Passover lamb must be broken (Ex. 12:46), and these two passages in Exodus and Psalms find their spiritual fulfilment in Jn. 19:33-36—

“When they came to Jesus, they brake not his legs . . . That the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken.”

This psalm, therefore, has led us—as all psalms do, as all the Scriptures do—to the sinless Son of God; the spotless Lamb slain from the foundation of the world; the perfect—the *only* perfect—embodiment of the broken heart and contrite spirit that is so precious in the sight of God—

“Not a bone of him shall be broken . . .”

“Not a grain of corn (of the true wheat, the true bread) shall be lost.”

“This is bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh” (Gen. 2:23).

“We are members of his Body, of his flesh, and of his bones” (Eph. 5:30).

And again the thought comes around—

“The Body is One, and hath many members, and all the members, being many, are One Body” (1 Cor. 12:12).

“The foot cannot say, I am not of the Body” (v. 15).

—what good, to itself or anyone, is an amputated foot?

“The ear cannot say, I am not of the Body” (v. 16).

—what good is an amputated ear?

“The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee” (v. 17).

In God’s wisdom, every member needs every other: and the Body needs every member.

“The members should have the same care one for another. Whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it. Ye are the Body of Christ” (1 Cor. 12:25-27).

“NOT A BONE OF HIM SHALL BE BROKEN.”

The Oil of Gladness

*"Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline
thine ear: forget also thine own people, and
thy father's house" (v. 10).*

PSALM 45

We tend to regard the Psalms as emotional songs of worship and praise and thanksgiving, expressing the inner feelings and spiritual mind of David and of Christ. Truly they are this, but they are much more. The book of Psalms is one of the most specifically prophetic and doctrinal books of the Bible. Of the nearly three hundred direct quotations from the Old Testament in the New, much more than one third—almost one half—are from the Psalms alone, and they are quoted for their specific doctrinal and prophetic evidence.

Psalm 45 is very closely related to both the Song of Solomon and the closing chapters of the Revelation. It uses very similar wording and imagery. It concerns the manifestation of Christ in power as a Man of War subduing the world—

"In righteousness doth he judge and make war" (Rev. 19:11).

—and it concerns the Bride, the Lamb's Wife, and the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. The theme of this psalm is *Truth, Righteousness, Beauty, and Meekness*. All the glory of Christ and the Bride is attributed to goodness and purity of character. All the purpose is righteousness and blessing—

"In thy Seed shall all nations of the earth be blessed"
(Gen. 22:18).

The psalm begins—

"My heart is inditing a good matter."

"My heart"—here are the deepest inward feelings and emotions—my heart, my whole inner being.

"Is inditing"—literally, as in the margin and R.V., "is bubbling over—overflowing—with a good matter." It is the figure of a fountain irresistibly gushing forth an abundance of waters: an eager enthusiasm that cannot be restrained or held in.

If we are to be accepted by Christ, this *must* become our frame of mind and basic mental condition: overflowing with interest and enthusiasm and thanksgiving for everything to do with God and His Truth and His Purpose and His People. We have known such, and they are a joy to be with. It is the characteristic of the true saint, though it will manifest itself in different forms in different people, for we vary greatly in our way and

degree of expressing our inner emotions. The most demonstrative are not always the most deeply emotional.

We must—absolutely *must*—develop a frame of mind where we begrudge *any* time taken away from communion with God and study of His Word and the joyful work of His Truth. This will never come naturally of itself, though we may be “in the Truth” for a hundred years. It will come only by meditation, and prayer, and an intelligent, mature realization of the facts and realities of life in their relation to God and to eternity. But it *must* come if we hope for life. Verse 1 continues—

“I speak: my works are for the King.”

So must *our* works ever be: *all* that we do, all day, every day. All must be consciously for God in Christ. We are not our own: we are bought with a price (1 Cor. 6:19-20). We have agreed to a complete servitude. We have no right to do *anything* outside the thankful service of God. If we do not realize this, and *rejoice* in this privileged spiritual bondage of love, we shall find at last to our sorrow that God will not be mocked (Gal. 6:7) and that He—

“Hath no pleasure in fools” (Ecc. 5:4).

Let us therefore, as the Preacher there advises, wisely pay our vows.

“My tongue is the pen of a ready writer.”

This is because the heart is overflowing with joy and thanksgiving concerning the King. If the heart is devoted to the right things, it will inevitably be manifested in the conversation: silliness and emptiness of speech about meaningless present things will be eschewed; gossip and rumor and criticism of others will be abhorred. The heart and mind will rather be full of spiritual things. Kindness, love and joy will be the sweet waters of every true and godly heart’s-fountain.

Verse 2: *“Thou art fairer—more beautiful—than the children of men.”*

So in the Song of Solomon—

“My beloved is ALTOGETHER LOVELY” (5:16).

Literally, it is—

“Thou art made, or become, fairer than, etc. . . .”

It was a process, a development, a becoming. It is speaking of the only true beauty, the “beauty of holiness,” and Jesus was—

“Made PERFECT through suffering” (Heb. 2:10).

The beauty was the character he developed under terrible trial and affliction. We must be able to see him as the most

beautiful, most attractive, most desirable object of our affections. Nothing must share that affection with him. If we love beauty and holiness, we shall love him. The love of holiness is a painstakingly learned quality of the spiritual mind: the natural fleshly mind loves fleshly things.

"Grace is poured into thy lips."

"Poured into"—it was from without—from above. All good, even in Christ, is from without, from above. He was *"full of grace and truth"* (Jn. 1:14) because he *"emptied (ekenosen) himself"* (Phil. 2:7 R.V.) and submitted in love to God's filling.

"THEREFORE God hath blessed thee for ever."

Let us note the connection indicated by the *"therefore."* Because he manifested the beauty of holiness and was perfectly obedient and submissive to the divine filling, *therefore* God has blessed him for ever. So it must be with us. God does not play favorites. There will always be a *"because"* and a *"therefore"* to all His ways.

The world is full of people—teeming with them—millions and millions and millions of them: all God's people in a generic sense. Hundreds of thousands are born, hundreds of thousands die, every day. Why should God bless *us*, and not them? Only because (and if) we are entirely—in our whole life's pattern—*different* from them; entirely dedicated, our hearts overflowing with love for God and desire to serve Him.

Verse 3: *"Gird thy sword upon thy thigh."*

Prepare for battle. Prepare to destroy all evil, and to establish world-wide righteousness and good—

"In righteousness doth he judge and make war" (Rev. 19:11).

Surely in these last evil, violent, morally corrupt days, just prior to its glorious fulfillment, this must represent our prayer more directly than the prayers of any previous generation!—

"Give Him no rest till He make Jerusalem a praise in the earth" (Isa. 62:7).

"With thy glory and thy majesty."

These are to be *"girded on"* with the sword. Truly he has them now, but the Psalmist is speaking of the *manifestation and exercise* of these attributes openly before mankind in the earth. Put on and manifest thy power. Become world ruler. Establish thy Kingdom by the righteous sword of judgment against all evil and corruption.

Verse 4: *"In thy majesty ride prosperously because of Truth and Meekness and Righteousness."*

This must be the foundation of any true power or glory, and Jesus by submission and sacrifice and suffering laid this foundation first within himself, that he might be eternally God's beloved and honored Son. These are essential qualifications for acceptance with God. All His family without exception must be thus developed by overcoming in this present probation. Jesus said—

"LEARN OF ME, for I am meek and lowly in heart" (Matt. 11:29).

The spirit of the world is pride and self-assertion. The spirit of Christ is lowliness and self-abasement. We must realize our complete helplessness and ineffectiveness in anything *worth-while and divine*. A little present success and prosperity and accomplishment in the world's meaningless tinker-toy economy immediately goes to our heads and makes us think our natural folly is wisdom.

But at best, we are but unprofitable servants to God, the only meaningful activity. Even Christ could do nothing of himself: all he accomplished was of and through God. Pride and self-assertion are at the root of all fleshly contention—

"Only by pride cometh contention" (Prov. 13:10).

Where there is lowliness and intelligent humility, and no foolish worldly desire or ambition or covetousness or greed, *there* is joy and peace and happiness and satisfaction. The world has everything backwards, everything upside down. The proud and self-assertive—they who *desire* things—are never happy, never satisfied. They cannot be.

"Thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things."

The root of the word "*terrible*" here is "*fear*." It does not necessarily mean bad things, but dreadful in the sense of being awe-inspiring, like the manifestation of God on Mt. Sinai. Of course, *destructive* things are involved, for the rebellious must be utterly destroyed—

"The Lord AT THY RIGHT HAND shall strike through kings in the Day of His wrath" (Psa. 110:5).

This is how Christ's "*right hand*" shall teach him terrible things—it is *guided by God* in the conquering of the nations of the earth.

Verse 5: *"Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the King's enemies. The people fall under thee."*

They can be sharp in two ways, and people can fall before or under Christ in two ways. When Peter preached on the day of Pentecost, his hearers were "*pierced thoroughly (katanusso) to*

the heart" (Acts 2:37), and repented. When Stephen spoke before the Council, they were "*cut to the heart*" and stirred up to greater enmity, and brought on themselves final destruction. It is the same arrows and, at the root, the same enemy, but how different the result in different people!

Verse 6: "*Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever.*"

Paul applies this to Christ in Hebrews 1:5 to show his superiority over the angels. The angels are spoken of as "*gods,*" but none is ever addressed in this special and exalted way.

The term "*god*" (*elohim: the word here*) is applied in Scripture to all who represent or manifest God—all on whom God conferred power or rulership: angels, judges, rulers of Israel. Angels said, "*I am God,*" as at the burning bush. Christ pointed out—

"God called them gods unto whom the Word of God came" (Jn. 10:35).

Christ was pre-eminently and without any close parallel the supreme manifestation of God of all time: the One above all "*to whom the Word of God came*"—

"God was manifest in the flesh" (1 Tim. 3:16).

"God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself" (2 Cor. 5:19).

"The sceptre of thy Kingdom is a right sceptre."

That is, literally, a *straight* sceptre: true, just, fair, undeviating. The sceptre is the rod or staff of ruling power. The word is sometimes translated "*rod.*" It is interesting that the word here translated "*sceptre*" is the one usually translated "*tribe,*" apparently because each tribe was under the rod or staff of a prince, just as we use the word "*staff*" for those under a leader.

It will be a "*rod of iron,*" truly; but it will be absolutely just and impartial and pure and holy. This is the world's greatest need. Today there is no holiness; and "*justice,*" even at best, is a pitiful, foolish, bumbling affair of human ignorance and error.

Verse 7: "*Thou lovest righteousness and hatest wickedness: therefore God hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.*"

The beauty of the Bible and the purpose of God is that all is based on goodness and righteousness. We are impressed with this beauty more and more as we see the world's morality and decency collapsing, and lust and pleasure and wealth and power increasingly becoming the objects of worship and praise.

Christ loved righteousness and hated wickedness. This is wisdom. This is understanding. This is godliness. This is the way of life and joy.

There is such a thing as righteousness and goodness, and there is such a thing as wickedness and evil, and God is the All-wise One Who defines them. And happy indeed is he who has the sense to love the one and hate the other. Thank God for this glorious revelation that gives us an unerring compass; a true, unwavering leading star in the darkness of the ignorant, fleshly, human night.

To "*love righteousness and hate wickedness*" does not just mean to be abstractly in favor of good and against evil. All would claim that. It means to actively *practice* righteousness, and have absolutely nothing to do with anything or anyone wicked.

"Therefore God hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows."

The anointing "*oil of gladness*"—how much we all need it! All are seeking gladness. The Scriptures tell us that there is only one hard, narrow way to it, and that one way is guaranteed infallible success—complete devotion of the heart and soul to God. This was how Jesus received the comforting oil of gladness, and this is how all his brethren and sisters must.

There are difficult times in the ecclesial world today. They sadden us, but they cannot touch our basic joy and gladness, if we are wholly at one in our hearts with God. No outward sorrow or disappointment or problem can affect our joyful inner relationship to God, except to deepen and strengthen it, and increase its value—

"Thou WILT keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee" (Isa. 26:3).

There are no exceptions, no deceptive small print, in this glorious promise. If we do not have perfect inner peace, whatever comes, the trouble is within ourselves, and curable by ourselves, by taking advantage of the guaranteed help of God. No one outside us can affect it. We have no one to blame but ourselves for its absence.

"Above thy fellows."

Who are Christ's "*fellows*" here referred to? The meaning of the word seems to lead to only one answer. The basic meaning is to *join*. It means to share, to participate, to be joined together, to be knit together. It means, and is usually translated "*companions*," and it is interesting that our English word "*companion*" means to eat bread together, from *com*, "*together*," and *panis*, "*bread*."

It is not a deprivative or competitive; it is simply a superlative. It is a harmonious supreme gladness among gladnesses. All his

"fellows" will, in their own proper order, share in his oil of gladness, but Jesus is supreme and pre-eminent above them all.

The essential pre-eminence of his gladness will, in fact, consist in the joyful knowledge that his labors and sufferings are the root and source of all the gladnesses.

"Fellow," again, turns our minds to *fellowship*—the most solemn and beautiful of scriptural conceptions. Fellowship is the core and nucleus of God-manifestation. Let us treat it scripturally and holily, and never degrade it to mere association for numbers or advantage.

Verse 8: "*All thy garments are myrrh, aloes and cassia.*"

(The italic word "smell" is not in the original).

These are the sweet and precious spices of anointing and of burial. It was a huge and costly store of myrrh and aloes that the suddenly-courageous Nicodemus lovingly used in the burial of Christ.

Somehow death and burial are always in the background of the divine picture of redemption—but not as a tragedy or a finality: only as a marvelous and beautiful means to a joyful and triumphant end.

Myrrh and cassia were ingredients of the holy anointing oil that sanctified the Levitical priests, and certainly this verse is related to the anointing oil of gladness of the preceding verse.

These precious perfumes and spices radiated a pleasing and enjoyable fragrance to all who came within their far-reaching range. Here is a perfect figure of the character and influence of Christ, and to a lesser degree of all who sincerely endeavor to pattern themselves after him.

Primarily the fragrance ascends to God—a savor of a sweet smell, well-pleasing unto Him. But it also radiates to the comfort and blessing of all mankind.

His garments *are* these joyful, healing, preserving spices. He is clothed and beautified and glorified by the virtues they represent of character perfected under trial.

Garments are "*for glory and beauty*" (Ex. 28:2); they are to protect; they are to cover natural nakedness and shame. Garments represent state or condition or position: royal, prisoners', widows', virgins', etc. In Isaiah 59:17, Christ is clothed with righteousness, salvation, vengeance and zeal. These are the fragrant spices that identify his work and character, and which he irradiates to all who draw near to him.

"Out of ivory palaces stringed instruments have made thee glad."

That is R.V., Rotherham, etc., and appears more correct.

Ivory is a very interesting figure. It is white and smooth and beautiful and precious. It is a living substance of great durability. Solomon made an ivory throne, typical of the Great White Throne of peace and righteousness from which Christ shall rule the world, after his purifying judgments.

In the Song of Solomon, both the Bridegroom and the Bride are likened to the beautiful rich creamy whiteness of ivory.

The word for ivory—*shen*—is exactly the same word that is usually translated “teeth.” In the Song, the Bride is praised for the white, even, regular beauty of her teeth. Teeth give to words form and decisiveness. Teeth divide and masticate and prepare for assimilation the food that gives the body life and health and strength.

Ivory palaces are dwellings of glory, majesty and beauty. Stringed instruments, again, stir many thoughts of rejoicing, worship and praise. The basic characteristic of the Cherubim of Glory, the host of the glorified Redeemed, is intense, incessant praise. They “rest not day and night” (Rev. 4:8) from crying “*Holy, holy, holy*” unto God. The “stringed instruments” that make Christ glad are the “*harpers harping with their harps*” (Rev. 14:2-3)—the hundred and forty and four thousand singing the triumphant Song of Moses and the Lamb.

Verse 9: “*Kings’ daughters were among thy honorable women.*”

This *may* refer to the submission of all the great among the Gentiles, as in verse 12, and “*kings*” (in the plural) would seem to support this. But on the other hand, its position at this point seems to indicate closer relationship to the King and Queen. That is, the *individual saints* who make up the Bride collectively. A possible solution that would explain and harmonize these considerations is that the “*kings’ daughters*” are natural Israel, now restored and purified and honored and in close and special relationship with the King and Queen. The absence of Israel elsewhere in this picture of the consummation adds probability to this application.

“*Upon thy right hand stands the Queen in gold of Ophir.*”

The right hand is the position of acceptance and privilege and honor and power. The “*gold of Ophir*” was the finest, purest, most beautiful gold. Pure, refined gold is victorious tried and tested faith.

The word for “*Queen*” is not the usual one. It is only used twice elsewhere. It does not refer to a Queen who reigns in her

own right, but to the chief and special and pre-eminent wife and consort of a King. Some versions translate it "*Bride*" here, some "*Wife*," some "*Consort*." It relates her closely and directly to the King, who is supreme.

Verses 10 and 11 are the heart and exhortation of the psalm—by far the most significant and practical part for us—

Verse 10: "*Hearken, O daughter: consider: and incline thine ear.*"

A solemn, urgent, three-fold charge; not just to listen to this particular message but, as the words mean, to permanently and continuously meditate and ponder: *Hearken, consider, incline thine ear*—

"Forget thine own people, and thy father's house."

Put out of your mind all your past natural connections. Put out of your mind everything to do with the world and natural things. Give yourself wholly and wholeheartedly to the King.

"Let the dead bury their dead."

Paul says—

"I have espoused you to one husband that I should present you a chaste virgin unto Christ" (2 Cor. 11:2).

Abraham was commanded—

"LEAVE thy kindred, and thy father's house" (Gen. 12:1).

Henceforth we know no man after the flesh. The only real relationship we recognize now is that with Christ and those who are his. Truly we are kind to our relatives after the flesh. We try to do them good as we are able, and as they need. We try to manifest in love to them the more excellent way. We constantly pray they will be drawn to the Way of Life and the fellowship of Christ.

But we have left the natural world of the dead, and have entered a new, glorious, living world in Christ: and between them there is a great gulf fixed—

"Forget thine own people, and thy father's house."

The family of God now needs the utmost of your care and attention and love and companionship. Have we resolutely made this called for break and transfer in the bindings of our hearts and minds, as God requires? Let us, in wisdom—

"Hearken, consider, and incline our ear."

Verse 11: "*So shall the King greatly desire thy beauty.*"

Two things are to be noted. The "*so*" tells us that the King's desire depends upon our faithful compliance with the previous verse. He will *not* desire us if we do not resolutely "*forget*" and put behind us all the things and people of the world.

And secondly, *"The King shall desire thy BEAUTY."* What beauty? Do we have, have we developed, are we straining every effort to develop—a beauty that he *can* desire? Remember Esther—

"Six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with sweet odors" (2:12).

Esther here is just a type. The real thing goes much deeper and takes much longer. It is the real inner fragrance and beauty. And the beauty had better be there when the time comes to go in unto the inspection of the King: the beauty of holiness, the beauty of character, the beauty of knowledge and wisdom in God's Word. We haven't any time to spare on the passing rubbish of this world.

"For he is thy Lord, and worship thou him."

Literally, *"Bow down to him"*—as Abigail and Bathsheba bowed before David. *"For he is thy Lord."* This is given to emphasize and enforce the command to *"Forget thy father's house."*

Let us not presume. Let us never be careless or thoughtless. Truly he is a gracious, loving Bridegroom, but he is also the stern Lord, Master and Judge. To bow down is to submit completely to the will and authority of another—

"Ye are bought with a price: ye are not your own" (1 Cor. 6:19).

Verse 12: *"And the daughter of Tyre shall be there with a gift: the rich among the people shall entreat thy favor."*

Here clearly is the submission of the Gentiles: the riches and glory of the nations being brought unto Christ and his Bride. Isaiah calls Tyre *"the crowning city"* (23:8). It was the richest city of the ancient world. It was close to Israel. It helped David and Solomon prepare for and build the Temple. Tyre was the world center for industry, commerce and merchandising: the mart of the nations.

All this will flow to Christ: all the earth's power and industry and wealth—such as is permitted to continue, will no longer be for the benefit of the greedy rich and powerful, but for the righteous use of the earth's new King. Isaiah says the merchandise of Tyre shall be *"holiness to the Lord"* (23:18).

Verse 13: *"The King's daughter is all glorious WITHIN."*

Surely this needs no searching out of the meaning. *This* is the beauty the King shall greatly desire. This is the beauty we must diligently devote our lives to cultivate—the all-gloriousness *within*. If there is any foolishness, or unfaithful stewardship of

our Lord's goods put in our trust, or worldly desire, or covetousness, or unkindness, or harshness, or gossip, or criticism, or any other fleshly, worldly thing, then we are *not* "all-glorious within," and there is no beauty for the King to be able to desire. Jesus said to the Pharisees about what was within *them*—

"Ye are full of dead men's bones" (Matt. 23:27).

How easy it is to be full of the dead men's bones of the things of the dead world! It is the natural way. It is the automatic, inevitable way—*unless* we make a supreme effort, with God's help, to be different.

"Her clothing is of wrought gold."

"Wrought" simply means "worked." Gold is faith. Her clothing is a worked faith, a tried faith, a faith manifested and developed and strengthened by *works* of faith. Gold is worked first by a fierce crucible of fire; then by pounding and cutting to the final desired shape and pattern of beauty.

It is interesting and thought-provoking that gold is perhaps the most universal of metals. It is in practically everything, even in living things. There are ten billion tons of it in the waters of the oceans. But rarely is it found in useful and practical quantities, and even there it takes great effort to produce even a little. So "*faith*" is found everywhere in microscopic quantities, but rarely is it found in sufficient amount to have power and influence on the life.

Verse 14: *"She shall be brought unto the King in raiment of needlework."*

Needlework is the slow, careful, steady, gradual creation of a pattern of beauty on a prepared and suitable surface and material. It can be seen to grow daily, if the worker is industrious and diligent. Its growth is obvious to the eye; its extent is measurable. If the work has not been steadily done in the time allowed for it, it will not suddenly appear at the last moment, merely by wishing. In all this there are deep lessons. How is our daily needlework coming on our garment of beauty and glory? How much of the divine pattern is complete and visible? What do we have to show? And shall we have anything ready to wear for that great assembly soon to be called?

Verse 15: *"They shall enter into the King's palace."*

That is, those who are properly clothed. Those who have faithfully wrought their gold and applied themselves to their needlework. And the door will be shut. The King's palace is his dwelling-place, and the center from which he rules. This King is also a Priest, and his palace is a Temple: a holy, living Temple,

comprised of faithful foundations, tried pillars, and living stones of the translucent beauty of the finest polished white marble. The righteous people who keep the Truth enter in with joy—with *“gladness and rejoicing”* (v. 15), and go no more out. They become God’s eternal dwelling-place.

Verse 16: *“Instead of thy fathers shall be thy children, whom thou mayest make princes in the earth.”*

Verses 2-9 were addressed to the King; verses 10-15 to or about the Queen. The final two verses seem most appropriately addressed to the King, or perhaps even more fittingly still to both combined, for now they have become One. The King and Bride are now the Multitudinous Christ.

Christ’s fathers—natural Israel—rejected and crucified him: and in so doing they cut themselves off from being the Princes of the earth. Truly natural Israel shall be cleansed and redeemed and raised to honor in the Age to Come. But the real Princes will be Christ’s children by faith; those who wholly devote themselves to him in these present dark days. These are the cherished, joyful fruit of the bitter travail of his soul, when for them he poured out his life unto death—

“He shall see his seed: he shall prolong his days: he shall see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied” (Isa. 53:10-11).

Verse 17: *“I will make thy Name to be remembered in all generations; therefore shall the people praise thee for ever and ever.”*

I Will Extol Thee, My God, O King

"Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and His greatness is unsearchable" (Psa. 145:3).

"PRAISE YE THE LORD . . . both young men and maidens, old men AND CHILDREN: Let them praise the Name of the Lord, for His Name alone is excellent, His glory is above the earth and heaven" (Psa. 148:12, 13).

What is praise? What does it mean to praise the Lord?

Praising is not just a form of words or an outward exercise. It is no praise for God just to have words of praise coming out of a tape recorder, or a record player. *Praise is a living condition*—a joyful, thankful state of the mind and heart.

We may remember God. We may keep Him in mind as the central reality of life. We may acquire knowledge and understanding of Him—but if all this does not lead us to be filled with praise and rejoicing in God, it is no good to us. It is mechanical. It is lifeless.

We must be filled constantly with the joyful spirit of praise. It must be the air we breathe—the influence we radiate. God is a Person, a Father, a Center—not only of wisdom and power and righteousness and truth—but of love and goodness and kindness and joy.

The people of God—the *true* people of God—are a glorious, joyful family, rejoicing in love for one another and for the Father of Love Who has called them all unto Him.

Most people are too wrapped up in *themselves* to praise God. Their own little circle of activity is all their cramped little minds can reach out to. They never learn how to live in the largeness and fulness of life. Their potentialities for *spiritual growth* and *expansion* lie dormant and useless, like the wings of a caged bird. They are miserable prisoners of their own *self centeredness*.

This can happen to any of us.

But, the spirit of praise *opens* the doors of the cage, and lifts us up to the vast heavenly expanse, and all the petty problems of the present shrink below us into insignificance.

Praise to God is the mind's great healer and purifier. It is no meaningless coincidence that the last seven Psalms are all dedicated to this glorious theme, and that the final words are—

"Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord. PRAISE YE THE LORD!" (Psa. 150:6).

To Know Wisdom

“To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding; to receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, judgment and equity” (Prov. 1:2, 3).

That is the preamble. That outlines the purpose of the book. Then he lays his foundation—the basis of all wisdom (v. 7)—

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.”

“The fear of the Lord is the *beginning* of knowledge”—any learning or activity that does not include, or is not based upon, the fear of the Lord is foolishness, ignorance, lack of knowledge. Any accumulation of knowledge that is not founded on the fear of the Lord is like putting new wine into old bottles—in a very short time the vessel perishes and the knowledge is lost and the effort is wasted and the laborer is shown to be a shortsighted fool. It is like building an imposing edifice on the sand.

And it is foolishness because it is being done *when something infinitely more important should be done*. Worldly knowledge is not always of itself foolishness, but the *pursuit* of it is, because it has no ultimate value to the pursuer, while a similar expenditure of time and effort in the right direction will bring eternal life.

We haven't begun to build anything permanent or valuable until we acknowledge the fear of the Lord, and our position in relation to Him.

“Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth” (Ecc. 12:1).

That is, remember Him *now* in the day of opportunity. Realize the folly of earthly pursuits before decrepit impotence and failing powers of old age force upon you the realization of opportunities forever lost.

Of those who scorn wisdom and pursue evil, Solomon says (v. 18)—

“They lay wait for their OWN blood; they lurk privily for their OWN lives.”

Little do they realize this deep and fundamental truth, but it is undeniably so. Everything we do is really done to, or for, ourselves. In the ultimate, we ourselves are the recipients.

“If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself: but if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it” (Prov. 9:12).

We determine our own judgment. Solomon says later—
"He that diggeth a pit shall fall therein; and he that rolleth a stone, it will return upon him" (Prov. 26:27).

And Jesus confirms this divine law of retribution—
"With what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again" (Matt. 7:2).

If we mete out mercy and love, we are meting it to ourselves. If we mete out selfishness and severity, *that too is to ourselves*. All will come back, like bread upon the waters. All will return either to bless or curse us, though we may have long forgotten it—

"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7).

Therefore, concludes Solomon (Ecc. 7:25 R.V.)—

"Wickedness is folly, and foolishness is madness."

Wickedness is folly because a course contrary to divine law is self-destruction. We cannot mock God. We either accept His love or we receive His anger. Self-will is suicide. Solomon in the second chapter likens the desires of the flesh to the appeals of a strange woman enticing the simple to their own destruction.

"None that go unto her return again, neither take they hold of the paths of life" (Prov. 2:19).

On the other hand, wisdom is a friend, safe counsellor and companion—faithful handmaid of God and instructor of His children—

"Wisdom crieth without: she uttereth her voice in the streets" (Prov. 1:20).

The excellence of wisdom over folly is such that verily *shouts* at us from every hand—

"She crieth at us in the streets, in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of gates" (v. 21).

At every turn, in letter of fire, it is proclaimed that—

"Wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness" (Ecc. 2:13).

And what is wisdom? A recognition of the *facts*, and acting in harmony with them. A perception of things as they *really are*. A discernment of the true proportion and relative importance of things, all founded on the fear of the Lord.

There are things that remain and there are things that perish. Wisdom distinguishes between them. Wisdom leads us to ask ourselves why we do things and insists upon a satisfactory answer. Wisdom demands a conscious and candid examination of our activities in the light of the things that are eternal.

Are we spending our substance for that which is not bread? Are we foolishly throwing our efforts and labors into a bag full of holes?

“Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee: love her, and she will keep thee” (Prov. 4:6).

“For whoso findeth wisdom findeth life, and shall obtain favor of the Lord. But he that sinneth against wisdom wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate her love death” (Prov. 8:35, 36).

“Let every man examine himself,” counsels the apostle (1 Cor. 11:28). And again, *“Let no man deceive himself”* (1 Cor. 3:18). For self-deception there is little cure.

“In many things we offend all,” says James (3:2), and there is always hope, if we are prepared to meet the verdict of conscience and wisdom, but if we refuse to face a self-examination, *if we will not recognize at least to ourselves how miserably short our best efforts come and how much God’s service demands—where is the possibility of improvement?*

Arise, My Love, My Fair One

*"As the lily among thorns, so is my love
among the daughters"* (S. of S. 2:2).

The true bride of Christ stands out from all her surroundings with the unmistakable distinction of a lily among thorns, a sobering and impressive lesson on the responsibilities of our exalted position. The lily—harmless beauty and purity; the thorns—poisonous and vicious. We do not claim this distinction, *we set it before us as an inspiration*. We strive to approach it as the ultimate ideal. We compare ourselves with it, endeavoring to remove the thorny characteristics, and cultivate the lily-like ones.

*"Be not afraid, though briers and thorns be with thee,
and thou dost dwell among scorpions: be not afraid"*
(Eze. 2:6).

* * *

*"As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my
beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow
with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste"*
(v. 3).

The picture is one of the discovery, by a hungry and weary traveler, of a familiar, friendly, fruit bearing tree in the heart of a wild and fruitless forest.

There is a beautiful parallel here—the Bride as the solitary, gentle, defenseless lily among all the rough aggressive thorns; the Bridegroom as the single life-giving tree throughout all the dark, unfriendly forest.

*"My beloved is like a roe or a young hart: behold, he
standeth behind our wall, he looketh forth at the win-
dows, showing himself through the lattice"* (v. 9).

This has been very fittingly explained as follows: "What is the wall, but our mortality which separates us from him, and what is the lattice but our faith through which we catch a shadowy glimpse of his perfection?"

Verses 10 to 13 are among the most intensely joyous and comforting of all God's Word—

*"My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love,
my fair one, and come away. For, lo, the winter is past"*
(v. 10).

The wording is so personal and real, with the extreme simplicity of perfect intimacy and understanding. Those whose hearts are united in love do not speak in formal or complicated language. The simplest of terms have limitless meaning.

"The rain is over and gone" (v. 11).

The Palestine winter was a long rain of tears over a cold and barren earth. But the dark period had a glorious purpose that was revealed with the advent of spring.

"The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come" (v. 12).

The solitary lily among thorns suddenly finds herself surrounded by a vast host of glorious companions, the thorns having all been swept away. And the air will ring with a tremendous symphony of praise.

"There is a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and time to dance" (Ecc. 3:4).

The time for weeping and mourning will have ended; the time for laughter and dancing will have come.

"Awake and sing, ye that dwell in the dust" (Isa. 26:19).

"Break forth into joy, sing together: the Lord hath comforted His people" (Isa. 52:9).

"They that carried us away captive required of us mirth.

"How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" (Psa. 137:3, 4).

While all the evils and miseries of sin lay like a poisonous fog over the whole earth; how can we laugh except in self-centered indifference to sorrow and pain?

"The voice of the turtledove is heard in our land" (verse 12).

That is our signal for rejoicing and song—the signal so anxiously awaited through the darkness of the night. The turtledove was the poor man's offering—the humble symbol of harmlessness, love and peace.

"O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice" (v. 14).

"Stair" here means "rocky ascent" or "steep place." Our Dove has ascended from us and is at present hidden high in the recesses of the everlasting Rock, but the signs are that his voice will soon be heard.

"The fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grapes give a good smell" (v. 13).

This is his specifically appointed token for intensified watchfulness and care—

"Behold the fig tree, and all the trees . . . when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand" (Lk. 21:29, 31).

This symbol melts into a more immediate and sobering one—
“*Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for
our vines have tender grapes*” (v. 15).

In the general picture of approaching spring, the vines are mentioned with their early budding grapes. The thought arises, what of the ever present dangers that may unnoticed steal away the fruit, and mar the joyful scene with the shameful barrenness of careless neglect?

“*Friend, wherefore art thou here without a wedding garment?*” (Matt. 22:12).

What has happened to the oil in your lamp at the very moment that it should be burning with its brightest glow?

Little foxes are such attractive little creatures, but appearances are deceitful and natural impressions are misleading; little foxes are sly and destructive. *Little foxes* soon become *big foxes*, their playfulness leaves them and they become cunning and cruel and very hard to catch and destroy.

“*Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, turn, my beloved, and be thou like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of Bether*” (v. 17).

For “*Bether*,” the margin gives “*division*” or “*separation*.” This final verse is the patient waiting of the saints during the time of separation from their Lord, founded upon the vision of verses 10 to 13, and the patient confidence of verse 16, “*My beloved is mine, and I am his.*”

“*I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, till he please*” (S. of S. 3:5).

This is a balancing companion thought to the injunction to “*give Him no rest till He make Jerusalem a praise in the earth.*” We must cultivate both patience and eagerness, longing and resignation, contentment and desire, an inner haven of quiet joy that transcends but does not ignore the sorrow of the world.

This Is My Friend

"It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

SONG OF SONGS 5; ACTS 20

The Song of Songs is perhaps the most unique book of the Bible. As in Esther, there is no mention of God, but God is throughout it all, more intimately than in any other part of Scripture—its chief character is God manifest in the flesh, intimately described and detailed.

What is the value of this so strange book of love? It is to create and develop a frame of mind—a sweetening and softening of character—a disposition of gentleness and kindness and affection and care.

The spiritual is taught by means of the natural. We are led from something we know to something we need to know. It is spiritual food for the mind.

It is to develop and intensify our affection for Christ, which is the power and secret of all overcoming.

It is to counterbalance present things. By putting the things of the Spirit in the language of the natural, it impresses us vividly with the reality of the former, and their infinite superiority over the latter.

For the eternal spiritual reality must always be immeasurably more intense and meaningful than the mere passing fleshly shadow that represents it.

The book portrays the relationship of Christ and the Ecclesia. It is meant to express, and by its study to strengthen, the bonds between them; to portray the manifested beauties of Christ, and the required beauties of the Ecclesia, that the contemplation of the one may generate the development of the other.

Generally, a progression can be traced, through acquaintance, interest, deepening of the relationship, espousal, separation, delay, waiting, seeking, finding, ultimate reunion.

While these aspects can be traced, and in general, in this order, still the progression of the narrative cannot, in its very nature, be too mechanically forced, because there are aspects of weaving together, repetition, anticipation, retrospection, to give depth and meaning and interest.

The term used by the Ecclesia for Christ is the same throughout—*"Beloved,"* except at the climax in today's chapter, where the much fuller term *"Friend"* is added.

But the terms used by Christ for the Ecclesia show a steady development, and this is one of the factors by which the narrative can be traced. His first address to her is 1:8—“*O thou fairest among women!*” This appears to stand apart as a general introduction comprehending the whole. Then in chapter 1 and in the beginning of chapter 2 it is “*My love*”—more correctly as in the margin, “*fellow*” or “*companion*.”

Later in chapter 2 it is “*My love, my fair one*.” There are none in chapter 3.

In chapter 4:1, 7, it is first: “*Thou art fair, my love*.” Then: “*Thou art all fair, there is no spot in thee*.”

Then six times: “*My spouse*,” or even more comprehensively, “*My sister, my spouse*.”

There is one occurrence in each of chapters 5 and 6 of a combination of earlier titles.

Then twice at the end of chapter 6 the proper name “*Shulamite*” is introduced, indicating that she now permanently bears the new Name, the name of the Beloved, Solomon, the Prince of Peace.

The last title, chapter 7, is “*Prince’s daughter*.” Here the aspect of royalty, majesty and rulership appears.

* * *

In the latter part of today’s chapter (5:9)—in answer to the question, “*What is thy Beloved more than another beloved?*”—the Bride, the True Ecclesia, gives a description of Christ’s beauty and excellence—

“*My Beloved is white and ruddy*” (v. 10).

Whiteness—purity—righteousness, is the first characteristic. Without it, all the rest would be meaningless. There must be this foundation; nothing else will endure.

The word for white also carries the idea of shining brightness, of brilliance, like Moses’ face, or Jesus’ at the Transfiguration.

“*Ruddy*” means “*rosy*.” It was used of David when Samuel first saw him. It indicates strength, health and radiant beauty. Strangely, the root word is Adam—red—the word indicating sin and the flesh. But perhaps, it is fitting that we should be reminded that this is the root background of the word, though in the particular form used here it means glowing health.

* * *

“*The chiefest among ten thousand*.”

“*Chiefest*” is literally, as in the margin, “*a standard-bearer, an ensign, a bannered one*”—the one who leads, and around whom

all rally for the conquest. *"Ten thousand"* is not a specific figure, but means an innumerable multitude. It is translated elsewhere (Gen. 24:60, of Rebekah's seed) by *"millions."* So the true, and obviously much more fitting and significant meaning is—

"A standard-bearer for an innumerable multitude"—even the great multitude of the Redeemed, *"which no man can number"*—for they are known only to God.

* * *

"His head is most fine gold" (v. 11).

Gold is Faith—especially *"fine"* or refined gold. This picture of the Beloved, while it is primarily Christ as distinct from and viewed by the Ecclesia, inevitably introduces the inseparable aspects of the multitudinous Christ of which he is especially the head of gold, as the Mercy-Seat, the Ark's coverlid, was pure gold.

Gold is also preciousness, royal splendor and glory. Here is the true and eternal divine Head of Gold—Ruler of the nations—as Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon were the false, presumptuous human head of gold.

* * *

"His locks are bushy."

The word *"bushy,"* occurring only once in the Bible, is taken by most lexicons to mean *"waving palm branches,"* symbol of victory, peace and joy.

The abundant flowing hair is also the multitudinous unity of the Son of Man (Rev. 1), for the hairs of his head (v. 14) are the many sons he has brought to glory.

* * *

"And black as a raven."

Black normally indicates sorrow and affliction, as of the Bride in 1:5. But here we have not black as such, but black hair. The basis of the symbolism is the natural, and in the natural black hair speaks of youth and strength and vigor and health, as white hair is age and infirmity. Black hair was a welcome sign of health after leprosy (Lev. 13:37).

* * *

"His eyes are as doves" (v. 12).

The eye is perception, intelligence, discernment—the mental viewpoint and outlook. The dove symbol is clear in Scripture. Its highest representation is when the Spirit of God appeared as a dove. From this all other meanings must flow. The dove is humility, guilelessness, gentleness, harmlessness, and peace.

With the eagle symbol, which also represents the Spirit of God, it shares the aspect of free, heavenly flight, of outspread wings; of freedom from earthly bondage.

There is an eagle aspect to the operation of the Spirit, but the basic, permanent manifestation is the dove of gentleness and peace. God is a consuming fire as need may require, but God is Love ALWAYS and essentially.

* * *

"By the rivers of waters."

Water is life and fruitfulness: cleansing; refreshing. Water also can be affliction and tears (Psa. 69:14-15)—

"Deliver me out of the deep waters: let not the water-floods overflow me"

—not contradictory meanings, but all parts of one great whole. All things work together for good. Tribulation worketh patience (Rom. 8:20)—

"He subjected the creation to vanity in hope."

All things in life are interrelated, and sorrow and tears will at last bring forth life and joy (Psa. 126:6). The water that destroyed the wicked world saved the righteous Noah; and the water that destroyed the oppressor Pharaoh saved the people of God.

* * *

"Washed with milk."

Again there are many shades of meaning. Milk is primarily the abundance of divine blessing—

"A land flowing with milk and honey" (Ex. 3:8).

In Isaiah 55 milk and wine are the free Gospel of salvation, the words of eternal life. To be able to digest milk only is a sign of sad infantile immaturity (1 Cor. 3:2). But though we must grow unto strong meat, still we must never advance beyond the point where we earnestly *"desire the sincere milk of the Word"* (1 Pet. 2:2) as our sound guidance and safe foundation.

Eyes washed with milk means pure and godly vision, a cleansed and enlightened outlook, viewing all things—understanding all things—by the light of the Gospel of Truth.

* * *

"And fitly set."

Literally, as in the margin, *"sitting in fulness,"* a strange expression, but surely intended to direct our minds to the final consummation of the *"fulness of Him that filleth all in all."*

Sitting is completion of work. The dove aspect *"sitting in fulness,"* is peace, end of labor, perfection—

"It pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell" (Col. 1:19).

* * *

"His cheeks are as a bed of spices: as sweet flowers" (verse 13).

The flower-bloom of eternal youth and beauty. All things, except Christ, grow old and die. Nothing in this life is lasting, but of him it is said—

"Thou hast the dew of thy youth" (Psa. 110:3).

"They shall perish, but thou remainest" (Heb. 1:11).

"Thou art the same: thy years shall not fail" (Psa. 102:27).

The greatest of present joys must so quickly pass into sorrow, and loss, and final loneliness. But Christ is ever young and ever new.

It is hard to really enjoy anything we know must at last and before long pass away.

We have all experienced intense pleasures which in their very enjoyment have been sadness from knowing that in a short time they would be over and would never return. On only a slightly larger scale, this is life itself.

But there is more to *"cheek"* than this. *"Cheek"* or *"cheeks"* occurs eleven times in Scripture, other than in this Song. In all but two (and even one of these is related) there is a reference to submission to smiting and affliction—

"They smote the Judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek" (Mic. 5:1).

"If any man smite thee on one cheek, turn to him the other also" (Matt. 5:39).

Cheek, therefore, inescapably turns our minds to patient submission to abuse and loss and suffering for righteousness' sake.

It is this that gave Christ all his value and his beauty, and his present never-ending bloom of youth.

* * *

"His lips are like lilies."

Most of the scriptural references to lilies are in the Song (eight times). All the others but one are either in the description of the ornamentation of Solomon's temple, or in Christ's comparison of Solomon's glory to the greater glory of the lily.

The lily as a symbol of purity does not appear to be a scriptural idea, nor do the Bible lilies appear to have been white.

The Bible lily appears to be a magnificent flower whose color ranged from pink to purple, and whose scriptural significance

was God-bestowed, inherent glory, as contrasted with human, superficial glory.

"His lips like lilies" refer to the divine beauty of all that he said—the *"words of grace"* at which his hearers marvelled—

"Never man spake like this man!" (Jn. 7:46).

"Dropping sweet smelling myrrh."

The name myrrh is from the same root as Marah or Mary, meaning bitter, and refers to its bitter taste. The combination of bitter taste and a sweet odor make it a perfect type of the sacrificial affliction that beautifies the character and is a sweet incense unto God.

* * *

"His hands are as gold rings" (v. 14).

Rings are a symbol of sonship, royalty and authority. Nearly every reference to rings in Scripture, from Pharaoh's ring given to Joseph, to the father's ring given to the Prodigal Son, carries this meaning.

An inseparable part of the beauty of Christ is his relationship to God and his universal majesty and authority based on his *faithfulness*—a ring of gold—

"This is My beloved Son" (Matt. 3:17).

"All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matt. 28:18).

* * *

"His belly is bright ivory overlaid with sapphires."

This word belly, which occurs thirty times, is in all cases except four translated *"bowels."* It means internal organs. Its use is literal and physical. A Hebrew lexicon sums it up as *"inward parts,"* and that best conveys the meaning to us, as in Psalm 51:6 (though not the same word)—

"Thou desirest Truth in the inward parts."

The word for *"bright"* literally means *"elaborately worked so as to shine."* The type is clear and beautiful both as to the being worked or wrought, and the resultant shining. Hebrews 10:5 contains the same thought—

"A body hast Thou PREPARED me."

The point is in the preparing—the inward working, developing, perfecting. Anything in this life that contributes to this process is good and a blessing from God. That is why *"sorrow is better than laughter"* (Ecc. 7:3).

"Finely wrought ivory overlaid with sapphires."

Ivory was always a symbol of splendor—here, of course, of the true *inward* splendor of a pure and perfect character—*"inward parts."*

Besides general references of this nature in connection with the kings and wealthy classes of Israel, the most significant reference to ivory is in connection with Solomon's Temple where it would necessarily have a spiritual meaning.

"Overlaid with sapphires" intensifies the splendor of the representation, as though the pure white perfection of the ivory itself, though precious, was not sufficient to represent the character of Christ.

Here again the type is clear and striking. All was of God, symbolized both by the fine working of the ivory and the overlying with the heavenly sapphire blue. *There must be the divine element throughout.*

* * *

"His legs are pillars of marble" (v. 15).

We have had the *"sitting in fulness"*; here is the standing in strength—faithful, determined and enduring. *"Stand fast"* is a frequent scriptural exhortation.

To stand is also to have dominion, to have conquered and overcome, as to *"stand upon the sea of glass"* (Rev. 15:2).

And it is to pass triumphant through judgment—

"Who shall stand when he appeareth?" (Mal. 3:2).

Pillars and marble turn our minds to the Temple, both literal and spiritual—

"Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the Temple of my God" (Rev. 3:12).

—an upholder and supporter of the edifice of God's presence.

The most precious marble is pure white. It is crystalline in structure, and its special luster and beauty is due to the fact that light penetrates the surface and is reflected from the multitude of crystals beneath. There is an obvious typical fittingness in this penetration of the light and its reflection from within.

* * *

"His countenance (that is, general appearance) is as Lebanon, excellent as the cedars."

The figure of the mountain—(eminence and power and majesty—the mountain that fills the whole earth)—is combined with the royal, unperishing glory of the cedar. A mountain of cedar trees—a living, flourishing, fruitful mountain—each tree an individual part of the glorious multitudinous unity of power that will at last fill the earth with God's glory.

* * *

"His mouth is most sweet" (v. 16).

This is not the common word for mouth, but rather, as the margin shows, "*palate*." The idea involved is taste, rather than speech, as the consistent use of the word elsewhere makes clear. It is sometimes translated "taste" as in the Song itself (2:3), and in its first use, Job 6:30—

"Cannot my taste (marg: palate) discern perverse things?"

The idea of the heavenly beauty of his speech is covered in the earlier reference to the lips. Here the reference is to the unerring and unhesitating discernment and choice of that which is wholesome and good, and the rejection of everything that is in the slightest way fleshly or evil or impure. It is summed up in a similar figure in Isaiah 7:15—

"Butter and honey shall he eat that he may know (that is, learn) to refuse the evil and choose the good."

The lesson is that taste, appeal, desire, is not a blind, unchanging force to be catered to, but a delicate capacity and potentiality to be trained and developed and shaped to spiritual ends and satisfactions.

A child's untrained, undiscerning taste rejects the wide range and variety of taste experiences which the providence of God has provided in that which is good for food, and desires only sweets. The adult learns that bitterness mixed with the sweetness is a much richer and more satisfying experience.

In our present imperfect, incomplete, mortal condition, unalloyed sweetness soon becomes monotonous and sickening. We are not constituted to be able to stand it for long at a time. The immortal state will be a perpetual intensity of joy without surfeit.

* * *

"Yea, he is altogether lovely" (v. 16).

Rather, literally, and much more impressively and vividly—
"The whole of him is loveliness."

The power and beauty of Christ is his perfection. Nothing out of harmony; nothing to detract; no danger of later discovered flaws to disappoint and disillusion. Nothing to fear from the cruel, unsparing microscope of intimate familiarity. The more minutely we examine him, the more beautiful he is revealed to be.

This is an unfailing characteristic of all of God's handiwork, but never of anything of man's.

This is the pattern God has set before us—the ideal to which He would have us ceaselessly strive—the ultimate to which He will finally elevate the faithful.

* * *

"This is my Beloved; and this is my Friend."

Why add "This is my Friend"? It would appear to be an anti-climax, but it is not. It is actually a deepening and enlarging of the picture. The figure is taken from natural things. "Beloved" expresses only a narrow and restricted and passing aspect of the broad range of personal relationships.

Upon reflection, we shall perceive that "Friend" is the fuller and the richer and the more inclusive and enduring, less self-centered, term—

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

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (Jn. 15:13).

* * *

In Acts 20, Paul is on his last journey to Rome not knowing what would befall him, except that bonds and imprisonment awaited him. The chapter begins at the time of the uproar in Ephesus that brought his preaching to an end there. He had been there two years. It was the principal city of Asia Minor, and a logical center for him to operate from, not only for the increasingly numerous ecclesias of Asia Minor itself, but also of Macedonia and Greece.

Naturally speaking, this would have been the reasonable place for him to stay and work, for the most effective propagation of the Truth.

But God's thoughts and ways are not man's. God had a greater and more glorious work for Paul—a work that required abuse and affliction, and a long bondage and imprisonment.

Paul was without comparison the most effective and fruitful instrument for the proclamation of the Gospel to the world, but God chose that he spend at least two years in confinement in Caesarea, awaiting trial, many months on a perilous voyage, and at least two more years in chains at Rome.

The first few verses of today's chapter (20) briefly outline his farewell visits to all the ecclesias of Macedonia and Greece. The detailed story begins with his arrival back at Troas, on the NW coast of Asia Minor. He has now set his face toward Jerusalem.

In verse 7 we get the clearest indication and example we have of the custom of breaking bread on the first day of the week. The Passover was over, and Paul was anxious to get to Jerusalem by Pentecost, fifty days later. This is why he did not visit Ephesus, but called the elders down to the coast to meet the ship.

But here (v. 6) he waited seven days at Troas. It would appear he had missed the assembly of the disciples by one day, and waited till the next first day, when they would all be together again.

As Bro. Roberts points out, the command to assemble and break bread is clear and unmistakable. To fail to do so is disobedience. Therefore, to have any meaning, the required frequency must have been indicated—if not as an unbreakable rule, certainly as the normal, desirable and expected thing.

The first day of the week was clearly not chosen for any particular convenience, because the seventh day was then, among the Jews (who were the first believers), the day of rest and freedom from work.

So the first day must have been appointed for its significance—the day of the resurrection they were commemorating.

That it might not just rest on this one incident at Troas (which could be just a local arrangement), we find a passing but quite strong allusion to it in 1 Corinthians 16:2, which confirms the general practice.

There Paul tells the Corinthians to lay a portion aside *each first day of the week*, that there be no last minute scurry of collections when he should come to get the gift for the poor in Jerusalem. If he meant just for each to lay by privately, there would be no point in specifying a particular day, nor would it serve the purpose he mentions—of avoiding hurried collections when he came.

* * *

We wonder what the lesson and significance is in the incident of Eutychus. It was, like many sad things turn out to be, a blessing in disguise. The occasion, of itself, would be one of great sorrow and intensity of feeling.

Paul would tell them as he told the Ephesians a few days later, that they would see his face no more, and that he was leaving them to face foretold but unidentified perils and sufferings.

Paul spoke to them until midnight. The brethren would be enjoying, for the last precious time, the pleasure of Paul's

inspiration, and deep understanding, and godly example. The sudden tragedy of Eutychus at this point would be a terrible blow of grief and shock, added to the general sadness of the occasion.

And the equally sudden, glorious resurrection, dramatically effected by Paul after the manner of Elijah (v. 10) would be an even greater shock to their keyed-up emotions. In view of this manifestation of the supreme divine power of life and death, the whole atmosphere of the assembly would be changed. Though saddened to lose Paul, they could hardly continue to be sorrowful or despondent.

They would see so much more vividly that all things—even the sleep of death itself—were harmonious parts of a triumphant divine plan—all in God's hands—and that Paul's labors and trials were a necessary part of that plan.

The sudden, dramatic death and resurrection of Eutychus at the midnight hour was a direct divine commentary and confirmation of Paul's teaching. After this experience, few could have been tired, few could have slept. Paul continued the discussion many more hours until daybreak.

At daybreak, Paul took off alone to walk the seven miles across the peninsula to the port of Assos on the other side, while all the rest of his company went the longer way around by ship.

Why did he choose—after an active, sleepless night—to walk, and to go alone? We are not told why, but we are told that he did so, and so there must be some lesson in it for us.

Though he had many close companions from time to time—brave, devoted, pure-hearted men, like the disciples of Christ—Paul was still in reality, like Christ, very much alone.

In fact, everyone is, in the ultimate, very much alone. Communication, even at its most intimate, is very imperfect and limited, and leaves nine-tenths of the inner soul unreached.

But with Paul this was more than ever true. He was a special man, with special revelations, a special mission and a special burden. He had communications and revelations of which he could speak to no one.

On this final journey, via Jerusalem to Rome, all his companions endeavored to dissuade him, though he knew by the Spirit that he must go.

It does not seem that anyone was close enough to him to understand.

After the experiences of the night—the many long hours of intense and active communication, of which he was the continual focus and source of power—after the emotionally and physically exhausting experience of the death and raising again of Eutychus, he would have to be alone to think and to recuperate, for the trials that lay ahead.

* * *

The next stop of which we have detail was Miletus, the seaport for Ephesus, to where he called the Ephesian elders to meet him. Verse 18 to the end is his farewell address to them, in which, like Moses, and Joshua, and Samuel, he reviews to them his ministry and his way of life among them.

It is a very moving and instructive address, as he reminds them of his many trials, of his faithful, ceaseless proclamation of the “*whole counsel*” of God, of his emphasis on their responsibility, of his charge to carry on after he is gone, of his solemn warning and prophecy that of their own selves misguided men would arise whose teaching would rend the Body and lead many astray, of his earnest commendation of the all-powerful Word of God’s grace which was able to supply all the strength and wisdom needed to overcome every obstacle and deliver from every error, and finally, of how—though with a great burden of teaching—he had not only supported himself but labored so as to be able to support others also.

He closes his exhortation with the one direct precept of Christ that does not occur in any of the records of Christ’s own teaching, and yet which sums up *all* his life and teaching—

“It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).

It is not necessarily material things. That’s a very small part of the picture. And the amount is quite unimportant. The widow’s two mites were more than all the rich men’s combined abundance. It does not have to be much at all. It just has to be EVERYTHING we have, to mean anything.

Nor does it mean that, in any particular instance, the giver is more blessed than the receiver.

Everyone can always be givers. Sometimes we give best by receiving. Sometimes it is the only way open to us.

It is giving of ourselves—giving as a way of life, rather than wanting, and getting, and hoarding. It is living outwards instead of inwards.

It is more blessed; it is more happy; it is more exciting and satisfying; it is more constructive and unifying; it is more Christlike and more Godlike.

That is the main point—it is more Godlike. God Himself is the Great Giver—

“He that spared not His Own Son, but delivered Him up for us all—shall He not with him also freely give us all things?” (Rom. 8:32).

What could God, Who has everything in limitless abundance—what could He give and make it a meaningful sacrifice? He gave His only beloved Son: His greatest treasure.

“IT IS MORE BLESSED TO GIVE THAN TO RECEIVE.”

It is the precious privilege of partnership with God.

These were Paul's last words to them. Kneeling down, he prayed with them, and then bade them farewell and returned to the ship.

Jeremiah

"Gird up thy loins! Arise and speak! Be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them" (Jer. 1:17).

Jeremiah's life is one of the loneliest and saddest in Scripture. His personal experiences were bitter; the message of disaster he had to proclaim was depressing and unwelcome; and the times in which he lived were of unparalleled national calamity.

His efforts were foredoomed to failure. It was a lost cause from the beginning. He was everywhere hated and misunderstood. While intensely loving and grieving for his countrymen and his nation, he was despised and persecuted as an enemy and a traitor.

But amidst all this background of thick gloom, there shines—in a few chapters in the center of the book—the glorious picture of the eternal Kingdom of Righteousness that will finally triumph, and in which this rejected prophet will have an honored part—

"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise up unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice IN THE EARTH (Jer. 23:5).

"In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely" (v. 6).

"He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock" (Jer. 31:10).

Jeremiah was born in the closing years of the long, evil reign of Manasseh. This king's reign sealed the doom of the kingdom and brought to an end God's much-tried longsuffering and patience. Jeremiah records, in chapter 15:4, 6—

"I will cause them to be removed into all kingdoms of the earth, because of Manasseh the son of Hezekiah king of Judah, for that which he did in Jerusalem . . . I am weary with repenting."

The evil Manasseh was born during the fifteen years that were added to Hezekiah's life when he pleaded with God. Far better for Hezekiah and for Israel if Hezekiah had submitted to God's wisdom and gone to his rest with his glorious record of faith unsullied, as God in His mercy had planned!

Jeremiah begins his ministry in the reign of the good king Josiah. It was a bright, brief interlude of righteousness—but it did not last. Josiah began to reign when he was eight. When he

was sixteen he dedicated himself to serve God, and when he was twenty he set about purging Judah from all their wickedness and idolatry.

Jeremiah began his ministry in the next year—the thirteenth of Josiah's reign. Jeremiah would be about the same age as Josiah—about twenty. It is truly a touching picture of these two young men—king and prophet—laboring to turn the nation to righteousness as the smoldering judgments of God hovered over the land, just as two young men—a prophet and a king—John and Jesus—did in the days of the nation's final judgment.

It is notable that Jeremiah's ministry began just forty years before the destruction of Jerusalem and the burning of the temple by the Babylonians. We remember that Jesus began *his* ministry just forty years before the destruction of Jerusalem and the burning of the temple by the *Romans*. In each case, a forty-year period of final probation was given to the city.

Jeremiah's mission was to witness for God against apostate and worldly Israel. The Jews today still jealously preserve and revere the prophecy of Jeremiah, though it contains their condemnation as a nation, and the record of God's pleading in vain with them to turn and be saved.

Jeremiah's work was not only as a witness of condemnation. It had a far more glorious purpose. *It was to encourage and strengthen the scattered, faithful remnant*—of his own day and of all ages since. In this sad time of present crisis for the Truth, its message of comfort has great and sustaining power.

When the terrible judgments came, it would appear that God had completely repudiated Israel, and that all hope was gone. But the lonely prophet with his message of eventual glory was a symbol that God was still concerned with them though they were unfaithful, and his prophecies gave comforting assurance that those who held fast would never be forgotten, and that though these dreadful evils were to come, still the latter end would be blessing and peace.

The name Jeremiah has become in the world proverbial for a kill-joy, for one who foresees only doom and disaster. But we know Jeremiah better than that. The world hates those who call attention to its wickedness and folly, and who raise their voice to warn of the judgments that will come upon it.

The Jews of Jeremiah's day are typical of human nature everywhere. Though they recognized that he was sent by God, still they blindly hated him for his faithful testimony, and resented his foreboding of disaster.

The world powers at the beginning of Jeremiah's time were Assyria and Egypt, but during his ministry the Assyrian Empire was completely obliterated, and its mighty and splendid capitol Nineveh—long the wonder and terror of the whole earth—was leveled to the ground so completely that it was soon forgotten and lost, and only in modern times have the ruins of Nineveh been found and identified.

And during Jeremiah's span, Egypt was cast down from its age-old preeminence and has ever since been a base kingdom, enslaved and ruled by foreigners.

Jeremiah's day marked the beginning of the great image of Nebuchadnezzar—the kingdom of men—*just now running out*.

Jeremiah prophesied during the reigns of Judah's last five kings—Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah. (The chapters of the book of Jeremiah are not in chronological order—unless this is noted and effort is made to get the right sequence of events, it would be quite confusing to attempt to place these various kings in relation to each other.)

When the zealous young men—Josiah and Jeremiah—set out together to bring Israel back to God, the picture looked very promising. In cleaning up the Temple (which during Manasseh's long evil reign had become broken down and neglected) there was found the Book of the Law. It is hard to realize that the Book of the Law had been so completely forgotten that Josiah, though seeking God, was for years unaware of its content. How impressive is the lesson that this could happen in one generation!

This was six years after he had begun his great reformation, and still when this Book was discovered and read to him, he rent his clothes and sent in haste to inquire of God what should be done to avert the evils therein prophesied.

God's answer to Josiah was that *it was now too late!* The evils were on their way and could not be turned aside—but because *he* was faithful and God-fearing it would not come in his day. It was testified of Josiah—

"All his days the children of Israel departed not from following the Lord" (2 Chr. 34:33).

What a wonderful tribute! *What better record could any man leave behind him than that!*—that all his days his zeal and example and influence were such that he had kept his people wholly in the right way!

As a result of finding the Book of the Law, Josiah kept a great Passover in Jerusalem—the greatest and most solemn Pass-

over since the days of Samuel. *Did the people, who flocked joyfully to that celebration, realize that this was the end?*

They had received—and taken for granted—God's forbearance and mercy for so long. But this Passover was terribly ominous in its seeming peacefulness and sense of endless blessing. God had always been there to welcome and to forgive whenever Israel tired of sin and its consequences.

But this Passover was different, as time was soon to prove. It was the final burst of divine glory and witness before the long Gentile night closed down upon them. They partook of this feast all unheeding that they were on the brink of the chasm into which they were soon to be cast.

The providential finding of the Book of the Law, the provision of a righteous king and a faithful prophet, and this great Passover—all these combined to make God's last manifestation of mercy to them before their impending national destruction.

But all this had no permanent effect. They *seemed* very enthusiastic and sincere while Josiah lived, but it was all on the surface, it did not reach to the transforming of their heart. They were still just ordinary human people, like the countless millions that have come and gone. Though there was a great show of piety, *they failed to make contact with the Spirit of Life.*

Thirteen years after this Passover, Josiah met his death in a strange and tragic way. He was still only thirty-nine. What caused Josiah to go out against the host of Egypt, and to persist in joining battle with Pharaoh even when the latter warned him away and assured him that he had no quarrel with him? It is very hard to fathom.

The record strongly gives the impression that God was warning Josiah through Pharaoh. This, too, is very strange—but perhaps in keeping with the circumstances. We wonder why such a man as Josiah would not seek counsel of God before setting out to defeat a great empire. But there are other cases of very good men neglecting to follow divine guidance in matters of great importance and, while well-meaning, bringing themselves and others much trouble.

The incident seems to come under the heading of a tragic mistake, rather than a sin. Pharaoh had entered God's land (though just to pass through) and Josiah, strong in faith, went out to oppose the invader. But God did not desire him at that time to set out to conquer his mighty neighbors. The defeat of Egypt by Judah did not fit into God's purpose. But apparently

the time had come for Josiah to be removed, so the determined course of history could proceed.

It is recorded that Jeremiah lamented for Josiah. Well he might, for he above all would realize that with Josiah's death the last curtain fell on the happiness and wellbeing of Judah. *The nation now had twenty-three appointed years of existence left—and they were to be a terrible twenty-three years.*

The most prominent part of Jeremiah's ministry now begins. We know little of his life up to this time, but now he finds himself at increasing variance with his nation and its rulers as they plunged down the path of destruction.

All Josiah's reforms and arrangements were soon swept away, and the illusion of national righteousness that had been maintained by the power of the king's zeal and influence dissolved before the ugly realities of hatred and bitterness.

The people made Jehoahaz, Josiah's son, king—but he lasted only three months. The king of Egypt took him prisoner, and set up his brother Jehoiakim in his stead. A heathen presumed to designate the ruler of God's kingdom! But Egypt was to pay dearly for this presumption. Foreigners were to set up *her* rulers (Eze. 30:13) *and so it has been for over 2,000 years.*

Jehoiakim reigned eleven years, and Jeremiah had much to do with this ungodly man. In the first year of his reign, Jeremiah was commanded to stand in the court of the Temple and proclaim to all the people that came to worship, that unless they put away their wickedness God would make the Temple a desolation and the city a curse to all the nations of the earth.

Exactly the same charges were brought against Jeremiah by the priests and false prophets as were brought against Christ—that he had spoken against and threatened the Temple of God. They said—*"Thou shalt surely die."* But at this time the princes and the people saved him from the priests, for in God's purpose he had much work yet to do. This was just one year after Josiah's death—the first year of Jehoiakim.

In the fourth and fifth years of Jehoiakim a very significant chain of events occurred—one of the great turning points of history. We are told in Jeremiah 25:1 that the fourth year of Jehoiakim was *the first year of Nebuchadnezzar.* (This, incidentally, is a very important connecting link between scriptural and profane history.)

In indication of a great change in God's relationship to Judah, Jeremiah proclaims to the nation that he has now warned

them for twenty-three years and that they had not harkened, and that consequently the long-foretold evil is about to begin. *Judah has now eighteen years.*

It is at this time that the Spirit reveals through Jeremiah that the captivity by Babylon will last seventy years. At the same time, Jeremiah is commanded to write all his prophecies in a book, and to have it read before all the people as a solemn witness.

This was completed in Jehoiakim's fifth year. The book was publicly read as commanded, and the princes who heard it immediately took the matter before the king, and began to read it to him. When three or four columns had been read, the king seized the book, cut it with a knife, and threw it into the fire.

That was the point at which the nation's doom was finally sealed. That event ranks in significance with the rejection and crucifixion of the Messiah. "His blood be upon us and upon our children," they cried, as the Living Word was cut asunder, and he was cast into the sacrificial fire. Jeremiah records with sadness and wonder that—when the roll of God's Holy Word was derisively cut and burned—

"Yet they were not afraid, nor rent their garments, neither the king, nor any of his servants that heard all these words" (Jer. 36:24).

At the same time, in this fifth year of Jehoiakim, which was the second year of Nebuchadnezzar, another event of immense importance took place—which though a long way away and under very different circumstances and surroundings—we can see was directly connected with, and dependent upon, this final appeal and witness by God, and His official rejection by the king and the Israelitish nation.

As Israel was rejecting God, God was revealing to an alien that He was rejecting Israel—the Kingdom of God was to be cast down, and the Kingdom of Men to be given unrestricted sway for *seven times*—2,520 long, evil years.

For it was in this fateful year, we are told, that Nebuchadnezzar received his dream of the great and terrible Image and he is told that it represents the Kingdom of Men that is to rule the world (with violence, bloodshed, and lust) until God's rejected kingdom is re-established. Measuring from this event (604 B.C.) it was *exactly 2,520 years to 1917, when the last desolator was driven out.*

Because of the proclamation of Jeremiah's book of prophecy, Jehoiakim sought to seize Jeremiah, but it is recorded that "*the*

Lord hid him.” He was commanded to write the book again, and to “*add many words unto it.*”

More evils were included because of Jehoiakim’s insolent rejection. Among them may well have been the prediction that this king—of all the long line of mostly evil kings—should have the crowning indignity of the burial of an ass, his body cast out to abuse and insult.

Jehoiakim doubtless felt he was quite a hero in daring to flaunt the Word of God, as is the custom of modern thought today. But God is not mocked, and the final end of the matter will show where wisdom lies.

All who reject God’s Word will suffer the same end—the *burial of an ass*, or, as David expresses it—

“Like sheep they are laid in the grave; death shall feed on them; and the upright shall have dominion over them in the morning” (Psa. 49:14).

We can afford to wait in patience, seeking humbly to work out our own salvation in fear and trembling. Popular ideas of *manliness* are the direct opposite of *godliness*.

Now that this final written testimony of God has been nationally rejected, a new phase begins. Jeremiah is commanded to *keep himself separate from this people*, as a witness of their rejection. He is forbidden to join with them either in mourning or in feasting. He found himself in the same isolated position as the faithful find themselves in the world today.

Much contention may stir up such feeling as to defeat its own purpose. But a silent, consistent, public course of action is a continual reminder that may eventually provoke sober thought, and accomplish good. God often used the personal lives of the prophets in this way—living examples and object lessons.

Like Jeremiah, God’s people today are required to manifest a striking difference in their lives from the surrounding world, so that they will be unmistakable beacon-lights of Truth.

Jeremiah was forbidden by God to marry. To the natural mind it may seem hard and unfair to impose this restriction on a faithful man through no fault of his own, but wisdom will realize that all pleasures and comforts are from God and He will surely see that none of His obedient servants will ever lose out because of their obedience.

There was no fatted calf in Jeremiah’s life to make merry with his friends, but he was among that few who live close to God, and of whom it is transcendently true that “*Thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine.*” There was a far deeper and more

satisfying bond between Jeremiah and God than can ever have been conceived of in the natural relationships of human beings.

Jeremiah lamented, as have many other men of God—

“Thou hast borne me a man of strife and contention to the whole earth!” (Jer. 15:10).

It is not a pleasant course, but when things are not right, no other course is possible. Would it have been a *true kindness* for Jeremiah to have gone along with them for the sake of peace and friendship, ignoring what was wrong—when his duty was to warn and to save them? As Paul had to exclaim to those for whom he had labored so hard—

“Am I become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?”
(Gal. 4:16).

Jeremiah was told that they would not hearken, but would simply intensify their anger and resentment against him because of his warning words. The time came when he was forbidden to pray for them—

“Then said the Lord unto me, Pray not for this people for their good. When they fast, I will not hear their cry”
(Jer. 14:11, 12).

Forbidden to pray! It had now come to that! *“I will not hear their cry.” Opportunity had finally past.* This would apply nationally, not individually. As a nation, they were doomed. The calamities and the destruction would come, and nothing they could possibly do could avert them now.

But there would always be the remnant drawn out, so Jeremiah continued to preach and to warn.

A little while before Jeremiah’s book of judgment was made public (as if to providentially create a background of urgent necessity for the message), Nebuchadnezzar had made his first invasion of Jerusalem, the shadow of what was to come.

He had put them under tribute and had carried certain selected ones away, including Daniel. Though this would give a tremendous emphasis to Jeremiah’s warning, still in the face of everything they stubbornly refused to even listen.

We are still in the eleven-year reign of Jehoiakim, whom Necho king of Egypt, had set up when he carried captive Jehohaz (who had reigned three months following the death of Josiah).

Jehoiakim’s reign was troubled throughout by plundering raids from the surrounding nations whom God was sending to gradually reduce Judah to misery and helplessness. Jehoiakim died and, according to Jeremiah’s prophecy, his carcass was

dragged out through the gate of Jerusalem and cast into the rubbish heap of Gehenna.

It was an ominous symbol of what was about to happen to the throne and the kingdom. Eleven evil years had passed since Josiah's death. Eleven worse years were to follow.

Jehoiachin, Jehoiakim's son, who followed him, lasted but three months and was then carried prisoner into Babylon, spending the rest of his life in captivity. But he managed, in those three short months, to leave behind a record that he did that which was evil in the sight of God.

Then came Zedekiah—weak, cowardly, and evil—but not as bitter against Jeremiah as Jehoiakim had been. However, with the increasing disasters of the country, the general antagonism to Jeremiah grew. The better and more godly of the people had been carried to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar.

This is shown in the vision of the two baskets of figs in chapter 24. The "*very good*" figs are those like Daniel whom God had caused to be taken to Babylon to save them from the miseries of Jerusalem's last dying days.

We see how strangely God works! Would the ones carried captive realize that they were the blessed and favored ones, though torn away from their homes by these cruel invaders and marched off in chains to a foreign land?

Very often what seems to be most distressing circumstances are provisions of God for our own ultimate good. God's beloved children are never at the whim of time and chance. "*ALL things work together for good*" to them, we are divinely assured (Rom. 8:28).

With the good people removed from the city, we can picture the hardness of Jeremiah's lonely position, left behind as a witness to this rejected and doomed remainder. It was his heavy lot to stay with them to the end, just as Ezekiel at the same time was chosen to proclaim God's words to the captives in Babylon, and Daniel was placed where he could speak to and influence the Babylonian conquerors according to God's purpose.

In the first year of Zedekiah, Jeremiah came into contact with the false prophet Hananiah who said that within two years Babylon would be broken and Judah freed. Jeremiah replied that for speaking lies in the Name of God, Hananiah would die within one year. This happened as foretold—a further divine

confirmation of Jeremiah and warning to Israel, but the warning was ignored.

At this time Jeremiah sends a letter to the captives in Babylon. In it he says—

“Seek the peace of the city whither I (God) have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it; for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace” (Jer. 29:7).

It is always somewhat of a task to adjust our relationships to the countries of our pilgrimage. Complete separation is, of course, the primary requirement, and we must be very careful to maintain a strict aloofness—even in our *sympathies*—from all politics and regional factions. We are citizens of the “*Commonwealth of Israel*.” To every other affiliation we are “*strangers and pilgrims*.”

But our general attitude must be as Jeremiah cautioned—no bitterness, no antagonism, no deliberate provoking of the authorities who are at their wits end in a crumbling world, but rather a detached but not unfeeling kindness and goodwill, “*praying to the Lord for them, for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace*.”

In this letter Jeremiah tells the Babylonian captives, as he had previously proclaimed in Jerusalem, that the captivity should last seventy years so that the land might enjoy her sabbaths of rest which the people had neglected to observe.

There is a striking lesson here. We see from this that all down through their occupancy, God had been keeping an accurate record of all the years they had failed to rest the land according to His Law, and now they were to be driven out while this full time was carefully measured off.

God may appear not to be noticing—someday the reckoning comes. “*The lord of that servant cometh, and reckoneth with him*.” “*As a man soweth, so shall he reap*.” It is inexpressibly sad that this so-often-attested principle is so generally forgotten.

It is interesting and significant that God said for their final punishment that He would render to them *double*. He says—

“First I will recompense their iniquity and their sin double; because they have defiled my land” (Jer. 16:18).

And Isaiah proclaims in the final call—

“Comfort ye, comfort ye my people . . . her warfare is accomplished . . . she hath received of the Lord’s hand double for all her sins” (Isa. 40:1, 2).

Now it is difficult to determine the exact years, but the general periods are clear, and from the call of Abraham to the destruction of the kingdom is in the very close neighborhood of 1,260 years, or three and a half Scriptural "times."

This throws light on the "seven times" (double three and a half) of the scattering of Israel (Lev. 26) and the "seven times" of the Gentile tree (Dan. 4). Seven times is 2,520 years. We are today (1953) living in the thirty-sixth year of the seventy-year time-of-the-end period, measured 2,520 years from the beginning and the end of this seventy-year Babylonian ascendancy.

In this seventy year period at this latter end of the great 2,520 year arch of time, we are in exile, waiting as—the captives were waiting—for Cyrus to destroy Babylon and issue the proclamation for all God's people to go up to Jerusalem.

The events of the thirty-six years of this period that have past (since 1917) make it very clear that the time of redemption is at hand.

There is another statement in this letter of Jeremiah's that stands out from its immediate context with eternal beauty and power—

"Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with ALL YOUR HEART" (Jer. 29:13).

We have now come to the final years of the kingdom. Zedekiah plotted and intrigued with Egypt against Babylon, until Nebuchadnezzar decided that the only solution was the complete destruction of Judah. We see how step by step the stubborn wickedness of this people brought catastrophe upon them.

The final events now move swiftly. Nebuchadnezzar's army comes and besieges Jerusalem; the king of Egypt set out to relieve them; the Babylonians go to meet him, leaving the city free.

At this point Zedekiah sends to Jeremiah to seek counsel from the Lord. It is strange, but perhaps very human, that all the way through this people seem to recognize that Jeremiah is a true prophet of the Lord, but still they hate him for his prophecies, as if they were his own personal opinions.

The answer of God was devoid of any comfort—

"Deceive not your self: the Babylonians shall take this city and burn it with fire."

While the Babylonian army was gone to meet the Egyptians, Jeremiah tried to leave Jerusalem and go to the land of Benjamin but was halted at the gate and charged with deserting to the enemy.

Why he decided to go we cannot tell. Apparently God's will was that he should remain with the city to the end, and this would seem more fitting in view of his appointed position, though it was very hard on him, and his desire to leave this hopeless, condemned place was very natural and understandable.

His greatest trials and dangers now begin. It seems that in his own body he must suffer to the full the increasing calamities that are befalling the city. He is beaten and then cast into a miry dungeon as a traitor and, we read, he remained there "*many days.*" Many days in the dismal filth of this dungeon, not knowing what the next day would bring, nor if he would ever again see light.

When we compare our prosperous, easy, comfortable lives, and the many luxuries we so take for granted, with the faithful, suffering pilgrimage of the holy men of old, we are overwhelmed with shame and unworthiness. We have largely degenerated to the conception that life is a self-pleasing matter of fine homes, fine cars, light social intercourse, picnics and games. What can arouse us to the terrible realities before it is too late?

* * *

We are now in the ninth year of Zedekiah. The city has one and a half years left—the final siege has begun which is to end, after terrible hardships, in complete destruction.

Finally Zedekiah again sent for Jeremiah from the dungeon and asked him secretly, "*Is there any word from the Lord?*" Jeremiah said: "*YES, THERE IS—thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon!*"—a faithful, fearless message.

Upon Jeremiah's plea to the king, he was not sent back to the dungeon, but confined in the court of the prison. But this did not satisfy the princes. They demanded his death. And the king said, "Take him—I have no power to resist."

So they lowered him by ropes into a miry cistern, and left him there to slowly die. Jeremiah would now be about sixty years old.

At this point a new name comes into the story—Ebedmelech, a servant of Zedekiah, an Ethiopian—a colored man—one of the very few good men in this book, and one with whom we hope to meet in intimate association in the kingdom of God, if we are found worthy, as he was.

He rescued Jeremiah from the cistern, and he was placed again in the prison court where he stayed through the rest of the siege.

Finally the Babylonians broke into the city, and destroyed it. The Temple of Solomon was demolished and all its ornaments and vessels taken to Babylon. The Temple had had a very sad history, and had never accomplished the holy purpose for which it was erected. *The Temple was a failure*, through the weakness and evilness of the flesh.

In Jeremiah's day it had become a hypocritical symbol of lip service and outward sacramentalism; inwardly it was a den of thieves. That which had been ordained to life was found to be unto death, and it had to be swept away.

Like the Temple in Jesus' day, it and everything connected with it were incurably infected with the leprosy of fleshliness and sin, and the Law required that a leprous house must be pulled down and carried forth *out of the city* into an unclean place (Lev. 14:45). So Israel's leprous house must be broken down and carried away.

Jeremiah is given his choice of going to Babylon to join Ezekiel and Daniel and the more favored captives there, or of staying in the empty and desolated land with the few poorest of people. This time he chose to remain. It would seem that he had come to clearly realize that his work lay here as a witness to this miserable remnant until death released him from his thankless task.

The Babylonians set up Gedaliah in charge of what was left in the land. He was a good man, and the Jews who had scattered into the countries nearby gradually began to assemble, and build again.

But peace and tranquility were not to be. God had ordained trouble and distress. Gedaliah and many with him were murdered by Ishmael, an evil prince *of the royal family of David*. It is another strange detail of the intricate divine pattern that in these dark closing days of the kingdom another Ishmael, even of David's own seed, rises up to trouble Israel, and ruthlessly stamp out the few embers of hope that remained.

In the extremity of their fear and misery, those that remained assembled to Jeremiah to ask him to pray to God for them. Jeremiah has now been proclaiming God's Word to the Jews for just forty years, from the happy days of Josiah down to this sad time when only a handful are left in the ruined land. They come to him and say—

"Pray for us unto the Lord for we are but a few of many, that He may show us the way wherein we may walk . . . we will obey the Lord our God" (Jer. 42:2-3, 6).

And God told him to tell them—

“Abide in this land, and I will build you, and I will show mercy unto you” (Jer. 42:10, 12).

But He well knew their hearts, and the shallowness of their “sincerity.” It was their last chance. All the rest of the nation were gone. The floods of judgment which had been rolling over the land for twenty-two years had swept everything else away.

But now God was willing to hold His hand for the last small remnant, if only they would accept Him. Surely, after all that had happened (exactly as Jeremiah had said) the few that were left would hearken when God appealed directly to them once more!

Jeremiah was told to warn them that if they would stay, God would protect them; but if they went to Egypt as they proposed, the sword, famine and pestilence would pursue them to the end. And *not one of them should escape from the evil determined*.

But for all their professions of repentance they showed themselves to be no different from the rest. It is the final witness of the utter corruption of the nation. They had learned nothing. Their approach to God was a deceit and falsehood, and He plainly told them so through the prophet. How hateful it must be to God when we piously seek His guidance in prayer while all the time we are doing and planning to do what we know is not in harmony with His will! Yet this is a very common thing, to which we are all prone, unless we exercise great care. Only with a pure heart and a clear conscience as to our purpose for the future dare we approach God. Communion with God, which we sometimes take so lightly, is a great and awesome responsibility.

This people had no intention of obeying. They were set in their wilfulness on going to Egypt, and they were hoping that God could be persuaded to go along and bless them in what they had themselves decided was best. What a strange outlook, but yet how common!

Surely it is obvious that there is no use praying for guidance if we do not sincerely intend to seek and follow God’s way, wherever it leads. There are many very plain commands in God’s Word. If we are not wholeheartedly trying to keep *them*—the ones we *do* know—it is hypocrisy to be pretending to seek His guidance in other problems that arise.

This people hoped that God would agree to their going to Egypt so that they could have the added pleasure of a feeling of self-righteous piety, but if He disagreed they were going any-

way, though doubtless quite willing to express their "sorrow" that it was necessary to break His commands to get what they wanted.

Jeremiah was taken with them by force against his will. He was right, of course, to object and resist being taken, but we see as we look back that it was fitting that circumstances should be such that he should go with them. This was the last, forlorn remnant of the nation. His long labor of warning was nearly done.

In Egypt two more prophecies are recorded—a brief one against Pharaoh, and a long one against the idolaters of the Jewish remnant, with repeated warnings of their utter destruction.

And this is the end. We hear no more of Jeremiah. We are not told how, when, or where he died. As the curtain falls upon the last scene in his book, it is still the same picture—the prophet's voice raised in faithful warning—the people rejecting his word to the end, and clinging to their wickedness and abominations.

And so the ever-rising flood of judgment closed over this last obstinate remnant of the nation, and all was gone. The Kingdom of God had failed, and fallen. The glory was departed from Israel, and the long Gentile night had begun. But the words of the prophet still remain—

"Ye shall seek Me, and ye shall find Me—when ye shall search for Me with all your heart" (Jer. 29:13).

"He that scattered Israel shall gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock" (Jer. 31:10).

It Is for the Prince

“O worship Yahweh in the beauty of holiness: fear before Him, all the earth. Say among the nations that Yahweh reigneth: the world also shall be established that it shall not be moved” (Psa. 96:9-10).

These thoughts are based upon bro. Sulley’s exposition of the last nine chapters of Ezekiel. Bro. Sulley’s book is one of the few basic books on the Truth that we should study thoroughly. It was the product of many years of investigation and labor.

Ezekiel’s Temple is a difficult subject. Many in the past had struggled to get a coherent picture from it, but none had succeeded. Bro. Sulley presents a consistent exposition. It fills all the required necessities, and it is in full harmony with the Truth. In fact, it very materially assists in giving body and substance and vividness to the Gospel.

There are today, unhappily, strong movements in other groups to try to break down and discredit this whole concept. A recent one applies it all to the days of Nehemiah: a pitiful, negative, dogmatic effort that at least does serve the useful purpose of emphasizing the beauty of the Truth by contrast. Another new theory thinks the service and worship of the nations of the world will be merely voluntary. More than ever it is important that we study, and keep clear, and defend the basic scriptural picture as presented by our pioneers.

None of us has any time to waste on non-essential, worldly, passing things, on mere self-pleasing activities. There is infinitely too much to be learned, and to be faithfully defended. The strength of a fellowship depends on the depth of the intelligent scriptural understanding of *all* its members. Life is very, very brief. We have absolutely no time to waste on present things.

If we hope for salvation—a few saved from the billions cast away—we must devote our lives to making ourselves a prospective part of the Cherubim of Glory which underlie and give meaning to all Ezekiel’s visions. It is of the deepest significance that they *rest not day and night* from saying—

“Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!” (Rev. 4:8).

Holiness is the essence of the purpose of God—

“Without holiness shall NO MAN SEE THE LORD” (Heb. 12:14).

The common conception of holiness is that it is theoretically beautiful and desirable, but too high for humans, and incon-

sistent with pleasure and enjoyment and having a good time. Until we learn that holiness is the *only* happiness, the *only* true pleasure and enjoyment: until we, by diligent scriptural study, get out of babyhood and infancy, and mature to the realization that anything not related to God is empty folly, and that anything out of harmony with pure divine holiness is ugly and dirty and repulsive—until we learn *this*, we are no fit candidates for the Cherubim of Glory. They forever rejoice in God: they rejoice in nothing else. They have no time for anything else.

The quality of pleasure varies according to mental development. A baby enjoys a rattle, a young child enjoys playing in the mud and comic books. As we grow naturally, we advance a *little* beyond the rattle, mud-pie and comic book stage, but not very much, as we see from the adult world's amusements. Most of mankind are content with this meager advance beyond puerility. But the Word of God studied and meditated upon can carry us to much higher and fuller levels of pleasure and satisfaction, related to the beauty of holiness.

* * *

Bro. Sulley's basic picture is very satisfying. He presents a building that is ideal for the purpose intended: a vast, open structure of massive but delicate masonry latticework and archways, filled in and canopied over by thick, verdant greenery—a vivid contrast to man's increasingly horrible and artificial monstrosities.

This building will have all the freedom and healthiness and beauty and freshness of open-air living, with none of its bareness or disadvantages. Trees purify the air naturally and noiselessly and effortlessly. This building will host a continuous flow of millions. Living greenery everywhere, ventilation everywhere, and pure, clear, running water everywhere—are its primary characteristics. A perfect site for the Feast of Tabernacles, or "*Booths*," to which all nations go (Zech. 14:16). The curse will be removed. The greenery will be free from all today's pests and problems. The weather will always be ideal.

Bro. Sulley gives the basic outline, but he is quick to point out that this is the most important building in all history, that it is designed directly by God's infinite wisdom unlike anything ever before, that Ezekiel's description is very limited and elementary: and that therefore while man can humbly suggest the general unrevealed details, as bro. Sulley does, to give us something to visualize as we picture the activities there, still

man cannot possibly begin to imagine the building in its full divine beauty as it actually will be. Bro. Sulley cautions us that the details and decorations and much of the layout are merely suggestive, and that we must just take them as a faint hint of the real beauty to be revealed.

At times he gives alternate suggestions; and we can legitimately formulate our own, within the basic pattern. But until we have fully studied and mastered bro. Sulley's book, it would be presumption to question or discount individual details. Bro. Sulley, like bro. Thomas, took scriptural detail very seriously, neither ignoring anything, nor conveniently spiritualizing it away.

The Truth of God is a thing of realities: beautiful, satisfying, divinely-appointed realities: not like the vague and hazy vaporizings of the world's man-made religions. Truly, mortal man can never begin to conceive of the full glories of the immortal state, and we must wisely ever remind ourselves of this. But when God has graciously given revelation and a glimpse of things to come to build our faith upon, it is our wisdom to seek to comprehend them. This is vital food for the spiritual mind, without which it cannot grow, and become strong, and overcome and cast out the earth-groveling mind of the flesh within us all. We shall be what we fill our minds with.

Bro. Sulley's exposition both makes many scriptures more plain, and gives them deeper meaning and reality and beauty. Such as—

"I will dwell in the House of the Lord forever" (Psa. 23:6).

This is not only a House of Prayer for all nations, but it is the central dwelling place and assembling place and working place of the Multitudinous Christ.

"They shall serve God day and night in His Temple" (Rev. 7:15).

Note the night as well as the day. There will never be darkness here. It will be ever brilliant with the effulgence of the Glory of God. There will be no weariness to those who serve Him in immortal strength.

"The 144,000 on Mt. Zion, who follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth" (Rev. 14:1-4).

The apex and holiest spot of this Temple is Mt. Zion, from which the Word of the Lord goes forth through the Multitudinous Christ to all the subservient, worshiping earth.

More and more, as we meditate on this subject, we perceive that this glorious building, this divine Workshop of the Spirit,

this House of praise and worship and rejoicing, this University whose student body is the whole world and whose curriculum is Divine Truth—is the living heart-center of all millennial activity and purpose.

“The Lord shall inherit Judah, HIS PORTION in the Holy Land” (Zech. 2:12).

The Holy Oblation just about coincides with Judah’s ancient area.

“I will give them the Valley of Achor (Trouble) for a door of hope” (Hos. 2:15).

This is where Achan sinned and was slain and brought trouble on Israel—the first and the typical troubler—profane, godless person—among them as they enter the Land of Promise. The way of the pilgrims to the Temple will follow the line of this valley, running west from the top of the Dead Sea, along the border between the Zadok portion and the Levite portion. In those pure and godly days to come, the Achans will be quickly singled out and destroyed.

“In this mountain—this Mt. Zion—shall the Lord of Hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow” (Isa. 25:6).

This house will be a vast banqueting hall, serving hundreds of thousands at a sitting; joyful, honored guests at the table of the Lord. The peace offerings of grateful thanksgiving will furnish abundant flesh, the first fruits will provide the fulness of the fields and gardens, the greenery of the Temple walls will hang thick with grapes and figs, and the surrounding trees by the river will yield all manner of fruit.

So many prophecies similarly dovetail beautifully into this foundation picture of the House of Prayer, with all its rich blessings for redeemed mankind. *These* are the things to which we *must* give all our hearts and minds. We have no time for passing rubbish that perishes with the using, taking its empty-minded devotees with it.

* * *

The Waters. Water is the symbol of life, natural and spiritual. Men are probing for life on Mars, and all we hear is that water is the key. If they can find dampness in the soil, they can hope for signs of life.

In this great House of Prayer, water flows everywhere: a pure, special, divinely-provided stream. It issues forth in tremendous, copious abundance from under the holy Altar on the top of the central hill (D on bro. Sulley’s Plate II), and flows “down”

(47:1) to bring blessing and health and life to wherever it goes. Its flowing *down* from the Altar is one of the evidences that the Altar is on a central raised height. In describing the Altar, it is said that the—

“TOPOF THE MOUNTAIN . . . shall be most holy” (43:12).

The details of the water’s course within the Temple are not given. It will be so arranged that it will be available wherever it is needed, both to beautify and to fructify, and also for utility and convenience. Abundant water is an essential requisite for any great assembly. And running water in great quantities will be necessary for the priestly ablutions and the washing of the huge number of sacrifices.

Partly the water runs underground, for it issues from the Temple from *under* the gateways. Bro. Sulley’s conclusion was that it comes out on the north, west and south sides, under all the gates, though the main flow of it is on the north and south sides. As it issues forth, it flows eastward, deepening as it goes. Ezekiel measures successively from the west end. At 1,000 cubits it is ankle-deep; at 2,000 knee-deep; at 3,000 (the east end of the building) it is to the loins; 1,000 cubits east of the building it is too deep to ford, requiring swimming. This last measurement would seem to show that it is augmented after it leaves the building, indicating it possibly issues from the east gates also.

To enter the building, all must pass through the cleansing waters: the deeper for preliminary baptism, the shallower for the necessary repeated washing of the feet, the cleansing of the daily walk. In this, the waters will serve both a natural and a spiritual use. We can be sure feet-washing will be convenient and pleasant, dress in those wiser days being completely different from today’s foolish and artificial styles and fashions.

From the building, the water continues to flow east to and even somewhat *beyond* the Jordan valley, for Joel (3:18) says it will water the valley of Shittim, which is east of the Jordan at the north end of the Dead Sea, where Israel encamped for the final months before entering the land. Here Moses delivered the farewell speeches to Israel that comprise Deuteronomy.

Ezekiel 47:9 clearly says in the original “two rivers” (see margin). This is north and south of the Temple—a mile apart. The wording of that verse seems to indicate they stay separate in their course eastward—perhaps diverging from each other somewhat to north and south. And Zechariah 14:8 appears to give the same picture that they stay separate—

“In that day living waters shall go out from Jerusalem: half of them toward the former sea (the Dead Sea: east: front); and half of them toward the hinder sea (Mediterranean: west: back).”

The most natural meaning of this would seem to be two separate rivers, one reaching the Dead Sea, and one reaching the Mediterranean by flowing east to the Jordan, then north up the Jordan valley, then west to the Mediterranean somewhere in the north of the land. Whether there is a water connection between in what is now the Jordan valley we are not told. There would automatically be such if the land stayed the same as now; but we are told there will be great physical convulsions in the land, so the present geography is not a dependable guide. The whole fifty-mile-square area of the Holy Oblation is to be lifted up with a valley surrounding it north, east and south (Zech. 14:10).

The word for “*oblation*” all through these chapters in speaking of the Holy Oblation of the land, is that which in Leviticus is translated “*heave-offering*” as applied to sacrifices—something “*lifted-up*” as an offering to God. So there is a deeper meaning to this lifting up of the land than mere geography. It is lifted up from the surrounding territory as a special offering to God.

The northern waters find their way to the Mediterranean, so the water level will be at least just a little above that of the Mediterranean. If we look at a map of Palestine that shows land levels in different colors, we shall see that with present geography that would create a lake averaging about ten miles wide from a point north of the Sea of Galilee to well south of the Dead Sea. This would be a pleasant and beneficial transformation of the present hot Jordan valley and the stagnant, lifeless Dead Sea. The slope of the Jordan bed would have to be reversed by the south end being raised when the Oblation is raised, so the water would flow north. It could be raised enough so the two rivers would stay separate, with an open land passage to the east.

It is a question whether the southern waters will flow beyond the Dead Sea right through to the Red Sea. Bro. Thomas suggests they will. Bro. Sulley did not think so, mainly on the basis of the fact that the marshes around the south part of the Dead Sea will not be healed, but be given to salt (Eze. 47:11). This, however, could easily be accomplished by raising a land ridge

that would cut off the marshes from the through flow of the water. Bro. Sulley also felt Isaiah's words—

"Look upon Zion, the city of our solemnities. Thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation . . .

"There the glorious Lord (Yahweh) will be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams, WHEREIN SHALL GO NO GALLEY WITH OARS, NEITHER SHALL GALLANT SHIP PASS THEREBY" (Isa. 33:20-21).

—rule out the idea of Jerusalem being a busy crossroads of commerce. Truly they do. Such would not be fitting. But the context seems to refer the expression more to a guarantee against any alien armed intrusion, such as Jerusalem had known for so long. There *will* be a waterway via the Mediterranean to the West: it would seem appropriate there be a similar one via the Dead Sea and the Arabah to the East. Though it will be a quiet headquarters of worship and authority, rather than a busy center of merchandise, still vast hosts must continually come there from both East and West; and water always has been, and doubtless will continue to be, the world's best highway for mass transport and transportation.

At present, mountains ring Jerusalem on the east, obstructing any potential waterway, but when Christ stands upon the Mt. of Olives on his way to relieve the city from the Gogian hosts, that mountain cleaves in the midst on an east-west line, half of it moving north and half south (Zech. 14:4), and—

"There shall be a very great valley."

The expression "a *very great valley*" indicates a tremendous movement of the mountain halves, and consequent disturbance of the surrounding land. It would seem that the lifting up of the fifty-mile-square Holy Oblation will occur in this same convulsion, and will, in the providence of God, be greatly destructive of the enemy hosts, swallowing them up like Dathan and Abiram. It is in the valley of Jehoshaphat beside Jerusalem that Joel (3:11-14) says God will assemble the hosts of the nations to judge them. And the King of the North, when he hears troubling tidings, rushes back from Egypt and sets his headquarters in the glorious holy mountain. He is there destroyed, and all his hosts (Dan. 11:43-45).

Certainly a great "shaking" of this area will be necessary to clear it of all the superstitious rubbish that now pollutes: Moslem, Catholic, Protestant and Jewish.

It would appear, too, most likely that this tremendous upheaval and disturbance in the land of Israel will be the occasion

and inauguration of the convulsions throughout the earth that will bring down *“every high tower”* and all the proud and lofty works of men.

Certainly such dreadful monstrosities of man's pride and folly as the ugly, useless Toronto Tower and the dark, towering steel money-grubbing canyons of New York must be swept away, to be replaced by sound, sensible, God-glorifying structures. Most of the large buildings of Detroit, the dazzling pride of a mere fifty years ago, are now decaying, out-moded and tarnished eyesores. So will it be with all man's ugly creations when the new, clean, pure, wholesome order of living begins, every man under his own vine and fig tree (Mic. 4:4).

The Temple is an entirely different *kind* of building: of health, beauty, and true utility, in harmony with the environment. It will doubtless be the foundation pattern for the wise architecture of the future.

The Kingdom Age will be ushered in by cataclysmic, world-wide destruction of life and property. This is sad but necessary, as it was in the time of the Flood, so that all human filth and corruption can be swept away, and an entirely new, clean, fresh order can begin. The Kingdom of righteousness cannot be built on rotten, shaky, corrupt human foundations. Psalm 46:6, 8 declares—

“The heathen raged, the kingdoms were moved: He uttered His voice, the earth melted. Come, behold what desolations He hath made in the earth.”

The context of this psalm clearly shows it to be millennial. And Isaiah 30:25 speaks of—

“The day of the great slaughter, when the towers fall.”

And Isaiah 66:16, again in an unmistakably Last Day context—

“By fire and by His sword will the Lord plead with all flesh: and the slain of the Lord shall be many.”

Again, Isaiah 2:19, the Lord shall—

“Arise to shake terribly the earth.”

And so says Haggai (2:6-7). We must think of these events on the universal scale of the convulsions of the Flood.

Bro. Sulley thought that the drying up of the marshes of the Dead Sea for salt would in all probability bring Sodom and Gomorrha, now covered by shallow water at the south end of the Dead Sea, to the surface again. Similarly, the waters flowing north, and the lake thereby formed, would completely submerge Bethsaida, Capernaum and Chorazin under hundreds of

feet of water, in judicial fulfilment of the words of Jesus (Matt. 11:21-24). And to complete the picture Jesus gives there, bro. Sulley felt it likely the northern stream would enter the Mediterranean at Tyre, restoring it to its ancient importance as the "entry of the seas." Isaiah prophesies (23:18) that in the last days the merchandise and hire (labor) of Tyre shall be for them that dwell before the Lord. This would be so if Tyre were the Temple's seaport.

Geographically, Tyre would be the logical place for the waters to enter the Mediterranean. There is a valley to it, and it is just about in line with the northern end of the lake that would be formed by filling the Jordan valley to the level of the Mediterranean.

* * *

The Prince and the Eastern Court: the most interesting and significant part of the subject. *The Prince is unquestionably Christ*. Sound brethren have had no doubt on this from the beginning. It is obvious beyond question to all who understand the Truth. Bro. Thomas so applies it in *Elpis Israel* as a self-evident fact (p. 297, 1910 edition).

First of all, if the Prince isn't Christ, then Christ—who is the heart and center of the whole picture—doesn't appear at all. This is impossible. Secondly, of itself, and even more so in the light of other Scriptures, an individual introduced into the center of the Temple picture without any explanation, as "*THE Prince*," cannot be other than Jesus. Modern usage of the term "*prince*" may take some of the force away. Scripturally used, "*prince*" meant the Supreme Ruler, the Principal, the Head, the Chief—of whatever was being considered. It was not a secondary title, as it is today.

Christ is "*Messiah THE PRINCE*" (Dan. 9:25). He is "*PRINCE of the kings of the earth*" (Rev. 1:5)—the superior of all kings. He is "*Michael the great PRINCE*" who stands up to deliver Israel at the Last Day (Dan. 12:1). He it is whom God hath exalted to His right hand—the place of highest majesty—to be a "*PRINCE and a Savior*" (Acts 5:31).

And thirdly, the very first mention of the Prince in Ezekiel's Temple chapters is in itself conclusive (44:2-3)—

"The East gate shall be shut . . . no MAN shall enter by it, because Yahweh Elohim of Israel hath entered by it . . . It is for the Prince."

For "*hath entered*," Rotherham has "*doth enter*," which is both more accurate and more significant. The East gate is that

by which Yahweh Elohim doth enter, it is for the Prince, no *man* shall use it.

The fact, too, that the *East Portion* of the Temple is associated with the Prince, both here and later, and not with the people generally, is another proof he is Christ, the High Priest. (His brethren, of course, are included with him in all). The Mosaic Tabernacle and the Temple all faced east. East was the front, the side of honor and preeminence. Here originally dwelt Moses the great Mediator, and Aaron the first High Priest. Here, in Tabernacle and Temple, was the main entrance—the *only* entrance—into God's House. East is Sun's Rising.

On every sabbath and new moon, the worship is centered around the Prince, who leads it (46:1-7). Likewise he leads the worship on the great yearly festivals of Passover and Tabernacles (45:21-25). Mosaically, this was the work of the High Priest, and none else. There can be no High Priest but Christ.

The Prince possesses the central royal portion of the land, the site of the Throne of David. The Holy Oblation and the Temple are IN *his* Portion. His portion is the same as God's: Judah—
"His portion in the Holy Land" (Zech. 2:12).

The highest priesthood in this Temple, the heart-center of the rulership of the Kingdom, *must* be immortal (1 Cor. 15:50). Where are they in all this service, if they be not the Prince and the Sons of Zadok?

Let us then briefly consider what we are told concerning Ezekiel's Prince. The first reference is 44:2-3, already quoted—
"No man shall enter by the East Gate because Yahweh Elohim of Israel doth enter by it. It is for the Prince."

Yahweh Elohim is God manifested in Christ and the Saints. The East Court is exclusively for them. Verse 3—
"The Prince shall eat in it (the East Gate, or Gates) before Yahweh."

There is no difficulty in Christ as Yahweh eating *before* Yahweh. He is both the manifestation of God, and the Son of God. Before men, he bears the Name of God: before God, he is the ever submissive Son. Similarly, the Christ-Priest offered the Christ Sacrifice on the Christ-Altar. There is no difficulty in his simultaneous fulfilment of many different types and shadows, for all converge in him.

He certainly does not eat bread in the East Court *alone*. Apart from the fact that he does *nothing* alone, we have his specific promise that he would partake of the Memorials anew with his

brethren in his Kingdom (Matt. 26:29), and that the faithful should eat bread there.

In this first reference to the Prince in the Temple, we have the great Marriage Supper of the Lamb. The Memorials terminate with this joyful reunion, for their purpose is to keep in memory “*until he come,*” but the Marriage Supper is but the beginning of an endless companionship of never-diminishing bliss.

The next reference to the Prince is 45:7—the Prince’s portion is the land to the west and east of the Holy Oblation. Actually, as a later reference shows (48:21-22 R.V.), the Holy Oblation is considered as part of, or taken from, the Prince’s portion.

In 45:13-15, the people of the land (Israel) give a percentage of the grain, oil and flocks—between a half percent and one and a half percent—to the Prince “*to make reconciliation for them,*” and (v. 17) “*It shall be the Prince’s part*” to prepare and offer the established periodic sacrifices for Israel. He will not of course actually do all the work himself: no leader ever does: but he will head, lead and supervise the immortal priesthood who alone may approach unto God’s holy Altar with the offerings.

Some have trouble accepting the fact there will be sacrifices in the Kingdom, and with an immortal Christ having anything to do with them. There should be no difficulty. First of all, there is abundant scriptural testimony, not just in Ezekiel, that there *will* be sacrifice.

Sacrifice has always been prominent in God’s plan of redemption for man. From the Garden of Eden, sacrifices pointed forward for four thousand years. Then for two thousand years the Memorial Bread and Wine—a very similar institution (but suited to a different dispensation)—have been pointing backward, memorializing, keeping in memory.

Clearly therefore God’s wisdom has determined that a periodic observance is beneficial and necessary for weak mortal man. Sacrifices were best suited to the *national* dispensation of the Law of Moses, and the Kingdom is a similar economy—political, national, compulsory and universal: not individual and selective, as at present.

Modern man’s chief objection to sacrifice is that he thinks he has developed and matured beyond that kind of ordinance and instruction. The idea humiliates him. He looks down on it as a relic of an earlier, more childish age. But in truth, there has *never* been an age more spiritually juvenile and retarded, and more in need of being taught simple, basic elementals, than the

present. Man is today a little more clever with his Tinker Toys than previous generations, but there is far less wisdom, and very little spiritual understanding. Even untutored savages have had the discernment to recognize the evidence all around them of a power and knowledge greater than themselves: but what benighted superstition was ever more utterly ridiculous than the modern religion of mindless, purposeless, moral-less Evolution as the great Creator of all things? What terrible blasphemy to see all the wisdom and beauty of God's glorious handiwork—the evidence He appeals to of His power and divinity (Rom. 1:20)—and to create an idiot god of blind chance to explain it all!

The re-institution of sacrifice, with rigidly-enforced judgments, is exactly what debased and degenerate mankind *needs* to slowly lead it back to the first glimmerings of holiness and wisdom and spiritual awareness. It will be a long, hard process, because of man's dulled senses, but God will lead him back to cleanness and holiness and spirituality. The sacrifices of the Kingdom will point back, as the ancient ones pointed forward. *Those* foreshadowed; *these* memorialize.

Even harder for many to accept is that (45:22)—

"The Prince shall prepare a bullock FOR HIMSELF, and for all the people of the land."

That large number using the name Christadelphian who have never been able to comprehend the central truth of the Gospel that Christ's great victory was over the sin-defiled and sin-motivated flesh he shared with his brethren, have consequently never been able to accept this fact of the Christ-Prince memorially offering *for himself* in type, as he once actually did. Here is the worm at the core of the modern theories that seek to do away with millennial sacrifice and the Messiah-Prince of Ezekiel. But perceive the Truth as taught by our pioneers, and the picture is both beautiful and necessary.

Christ will reign on earth in supreme, visible power and glory: the benevolent benefactor of all mankind—showering good on all.

Therefore, in the light of mankind's historic tendencies and spiritual limitations, what is obviously and absolutely necessary?

It is this: *repeated, open, public acts on the part of Christ attributing all glory and honor and power to the Father-Creator.* And sacrifice, as it is set up in this world center of authority and

worship and pilgrimage, is the ideal method of keeping this clear.

God is supreme. HE must be kept in the foreground. The past redemption of the race at Calvary must be continually kept in memory. Christ must publicly worship God. He must offer sacrifices as a token of submission and dependence, and to memorialize the way in which the Eternal Father was pleased to redeem the world by him.

When we see how the Trinity theory—an almost universal delusion as far as Christendom is concerned—has confused Christ with God, even in his mortal days and now in his absence, we see how vitally necessary it will be to keep the issues clear at a time of his glorious visible power and presence. Man tends to worship what he can see.

And indeed Christ is to be worshiped: but in his proper place in the divine scheme. Therefore sacrifice, and Christ offering it. Sacrifice exalts God, and abases man. Sacrifice accepted gives joy and comfort and assurance to the righteous. Sacrifice rejected—as it will on occasion be—brings exposure of the Achans and Ananias, and swift justice to the wicked. It is a glorious millennial provision that the righteous will rejoice in the wisdom of, and the wicked will rail at.

In a psalm clearly Millennial and Messianic, Christ says—
“*I will give Thee thanks in the Great Congregation*” (Psa. 35:18).

We can trace this pattern of Christ publicly worshiping God in the Age to Come in many psalms. Christ, as we have seen—
“*Prepares a bullock for himself and for all the people*” (45:22).

Does it seem fitting that the supreme, immortal Christ offer a joint sacrifice for himself and the mortal people? It will be seen fitting as a beautiful act of Christ’s love and God’s wisdom, if we see the true picture. These people are now Christ’s devoted and loving brethren, even as *we* consider ourselves today. (We do not here take into account the wicked among them: they are passing and incidental, not part of the true eternal picture. All *today* are not faithful, either).

How better could Christ manifest his oneness with them, his love for them, and his example-giving submission to God, in leading them in all righteousness, even as he submitted to baptism?

Ezekiel 45:21-25 very interestingly reinstitutes the Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles, but not Pentecost—the other of

the three great feasts of the year. The foundation Passover sacrifice, typifying Christ's great offering, and the joyful, year-end harvest Feast of Tabernacles, typifying the final millennial ingathering, are still both relevant to the peoples of the earth. But Pentecost is the Firstfruits, and has already been fulfilled in the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

Chapter 46 brings us back to the East Gate, or rather focuses our attention on it anew, for we have been there all the time. It is where the Prince meets the people, and officiates on their behalf.

It shall be shut (v. 1) the six working days, and opened on the weekly sabbath and monthly new moon (as also clearly on the great yearly feasts). There the Prince shall stand and worship God before all the assembled people in the Tabernacle, who fill the Separate Place* with their eyes all turned to this East Gate.

The Ascent to the Altar (A.V.: stairs 43:17) on the top of the mountain is directly facing the middle East Gate. Up this Ascent all the sacrifices must be conveyed to be consumed by the fire of God upon the summit. Whether the Prince himself ascends the mountain to the Altar on special occasions, we do not know. We are not told. It would seem fitting he should, in sight of the hushed and worshiping multitude. It is the holiest place of all (43:12)—

"This is the law of the House. Upon the top of the mountain the whole limit round about shall be most holy. BEHOLD, THIS IS THE LAW OF THE HOUSE."

An ascent thereto would, like a greater antitypical Moses, be a beautiful and impressive enactment of that glorious promise to all who have the wisdom to perceive the beauty of holiness (Psa. 24:3, 4)—

*"Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord?
Or who shall stand in His Holy Place?"*

HE THAT HATH CLEAN HANDS AND A PURE HEART!"

*We urge a familiarity with the illustrations in bro. Sulley's book, in order to visualize these scenes. The Separate Place is the four triangular corners between the square and round buildings.

Ye Are My Witnesses

"O children of Israel, you only have I known of all the families of the earth" (Amos 3:2).

To people who are *prepared to think*, the Jew is a subject of endless marvel. In so many aspects of his life and circumstances and history, he is unique among men.

By the term "Jew," we refer to the whole Hebrew race from its beginning. Some may question the accuracy of this application, arguing that "Jew" is a late name and applies only to Judah, but we use it in the same inclusive sense that Jesus did when he said—

"SALVATION IS OF THE JEWS" (Jn. 4:22).

And as Paul did when he said—

"What advantage hath the Jew? Much every way, because unto them were committed the oracles of God" (Rom. 3:1, 2).

The Scriptures speak of mankind as falling into two broad classes—Jew and Gentile. See Romans 1:16; 2:9.

SUPERNATURAL ELEMENTS

We would like to look at many strange and wonderful things concerning the Jews—things which should convince anyone that there is a large element of the supernatural in their history; that the Jews are, as God has said, *His witnesses among men (Isa. 43:10)*—witnesses that He is God, that He is controlling the affairs of men, that He is true, faithful and righteous, a God of Judgment, *and that He has a great purpose with the earth and man.*

The Jews have never been permitted to be like other people. From the very beginning, they were picked out by God and were faced with the choice between supreme blessing or supreme suffering. Unfortunately, all through their long history, they have chosen the latter. God said to them, through the prophet, Amos—

"O children of Israel, you only have I known of all the families of the earth" (Amos 3:2).

In Deuteronomy 32, at the time the Jews were about to enter the Promised Land, three thousand five hundred years ago, it is recorded, verse 8—

"When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when He separated the sons of Adam, He set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel" (Deut. 32:8).

The nations of the earth were distributed at the beginning according to God's foreseen purpose with the Jews. And in Deuteronomy 7:6, Moses declares to the nation of Israel—

"For thou are an holy people unto the Lord thy God. The Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto Himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth" (Deut. 7:6).

For one thousand years, God pleaded with them—through His prophets—to obey Him and receive His love and blessings. Then He carried them all away captive into Babylon, and desolated the land. Seventy years later He opened the way for all who desired to return. Immediately again they turned aside to evil.

He bore with them five hundred years more, finally sending His Son, whom they killed. Then God brought down His fury upon them to the uttermost, destroying all their cities and scattering them throughout the earth. That was two thousand years ago, and that has been their condition ever since.

The Jews have always been in the forefront of attention, both of God and of man. The very circumstances of their birth as a nation—their deliverance from Egyptian bondage under Moses—were deliberately arranged by God that, as He declares—

"My Name might be declared throughout all the earth"
(Ex. 9:16).

And Paul tells us that all the things that have happened to them were for *examples and lessons* to all the rest of mankind.

DIVINE PATIENCE—AND DIVINE JUDGMENT

Just a few moments reflection will bring to mind many well known respects in which the Jews are unique among mankind. For two thousand years they have wandered homeless, everywhere persecuted and despised, but *never losing their identity*. The Jew is literally *everywhere*. In any town of any size, he will be found—a separate, marked man. Generally speaking, this is true throughout the whole world.

And though without any national unity for two thousand years, he always remains distinct, a strange, undissolvable ingredient in the great human melting pot. If, under the spell of tolerance and prosperity, he begins to forget his separateness, as in Germany a generation or two ago, he is soon terribly reminded of it in lessons of blood and sword.

The Jews have been a separate people for three thousand five hundred years, *more than half of that time without a land or any*

of the factors that normally hold a people together. The Jews were an ancient nation centuries before Greece and Rome had their earliest barbaric beginnings. The Jew can trace his story back into the remote past to the time of the almost legendary empires of the Hittites, the Amorites, the Babylonians and the Assyrians, who all disappeared long ages ago. The Jews, un-changing, has watched many civilizations rise and fall.

THE MAN

The man who has had an immeasurably greater effect on the history of the world than any other—the man about whom probably more has been written than of all other men together—the man who is the foundation of everything that is good and decent in modern civilizations, was of the *Jewish race*. And, stranger still, this greatest of all Jews, though accepted (at least *nominally* by the Gentile world) has always been bitterly rejected by the Jews.

THE BOOK

The book which has admittedly had more influence on the world than any other—the book that has consistently, year after year *for centuries*, remained the unchallenged best-seller, pouring forth endlessly in hundreds of millions of copies—is a *Jewish book* taken over *without change* by the proud Christian world from the despised Jew.

With the decline in the recognized authority of the Bible during the past one hundred years has come the decline of all standards of morality and decency and human relationships. This is not just a private opinion. George Washington said—
“It is *impossible* to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible.”

President Grant said—

“To the influence of this book we are indebted for *all* the progress made in *true civilization*.”

And President Wilson said—

“A man has deprived himself of the best there is in the world who has deprived himself of this.”

These are not quoted as authorities, but simply to show how even men of the world recognize the uniqueness of this *Jewish* book.

THE LAW

T. H. Huxley, the noted evolutionist partner of Darwin, admitted (and he was simply stating a provable fact)—

“DOWN TO MODERN TIMES, no State has had a constitution which the interests of the people are so largely taken into account as in DEUTERONOMY and LEVITICUS.”

How did it happen that the Jews were thousands of years in advance in social legislation? Moses declared—

“*What nation is there that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law?*” (Deut. 4:8).

Huxley continues—

“NOWHERE is the fundamental truth that the welfare of the State in the long run depends upon the RIGHTEOUSNESS of the citizen so strongly laid down AS IN THIS LAW.

THE LESSON

And, it may be added, nowhere is that truth *more tragically demonstrated* than in the history of this unhappy people! The Bible gives an unvarnished picture of prolonged pleading by God and prolonged wickedness by Israel, until at last they were all cast out from His presence into the long night of misery that only now just begins to brighten into dawn. Yet *still* they guard and cherish (though they do not study and obey) this Book that condemns and exposes them.

And during all their wandering, they have dreamed of returning to Palestine, but have had to watch for two thousand weary years while that land gradually, through abuse and neglect, sank to barrenness and desolation.

THE BIBLE TRUE—THE KINGDOM SURE

Our desire is to use the Jew to prove two things—

1. The divine, infallible truth of the Bible, and
2. That God will establish a universal kingdom of righteousness on earth.

All we have said or will say is solely with these two things in mind. As we shall see, the remarkable facts concerning the Jews with which everyone is familiar *have been in the prophetic record from this people's earliest beginnings*, undeniable evidence of God's foreknowledge and power.

And, on the second item, Palestine and the Jewish people are great, *factual* links that bind the coming Kingdom of God and Age of Righteousness firmly to the earth in its future glorified state. They are inescapable, literal facts, and the prophecies concerning them, when fairly examined, will be seen to be inescapably literal.

And there is a third great lesson in the background that we cannot fail to see. Surely it must impress us indelibly as we

contemplate this people. That is—*how sad and foolish it is to reject God's favor and provoke His anger!*

Let us then turn to the Scriptures to see how God's Word concerning the Jews has been so marvelously fulfilled, and to see what still lies in store. There are seven heads into which the matter we desire to treat conveniently falls—

1. THE PRESERVED, CONDEMNING WITNESS OF THE WORD

It is prophesied that the Word of God, entrusted to the Jews, *would endure forever*, and that the Jews would preserve these records as a witness for God and against themselves.

(We shall quote from the *Jews' own modern version*, put out by the Jewish Publication Society of America. It can easily be followed in the Authorized Version, from which it varies very little.)

In Deuteronomy 31 it is recorded that, as their first great God-given leader Moses was about to die, God said through him (vs. 19, 21, 26)—

"Write ye this Song for you and teach thou it the children of Israel. Put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for Me against the children of Israel.

"It shall come to pass, when many evils and troubles are come upon them, that this Song shall testify before them as a witness, for it shall not be forgotten out of the mouth of their seed.

"Take this Book of the Law, and put it by the side of the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there for a Witness against thee" (Deut. 31:19, 21, 26).

Today, *three thousand five hundred years later*, the Jews still jealously preserve this Book of the Law, with this song. It is regularly read to the people in the synagogues.

2. CONTINUAL WICKEDNESS—FORETOLD AND RECORDED

The second item is their continual wickedness. We desire to draw attention to it from two points of view. First, as a matter of fulfilled prophecy, for this was written from the very beginning of their history; and second, the remarkable fact that—*unlike any other people*—the national records of the Jews are one continuous catalog of national condemnation, explaining in the most humiliating terms the reasons for their long degradation. Moses continues in this chapter (Deut. 31:29, still from the Jewish version)—

"For I KNOW that after my death ye will deal corruptly and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you, and evil WILL befall you in the end of days, because ye will do that which is evil in the sight of the Lord."

And in the Song of Witness referred to here and recorded in the next chapter (Deut. 32), we find—

"A generation crooked and perverse. Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish people and unwise? For they are a nation void of counsel, and there is no understanding in them. If they were wise they would understand this—they would discern their latter end.

"Their grapes are grapes of gall, their clusters are bitter. Their wine is the venom of serpents, and the cruel poison of asps" (Deut. 32:5, 6, 28, 29, 32, 33).

For three thousand five hundred years they have preserved, as their *greatest national treasure*, a book that constantly speaks of their wickedness, abominations and rebellions. Time and time again, it warns them of the misery that would be sure to befall them if they did not repent. Wherever we turn in all their Scriptures, the testimony is the same. The prophet Jeremiah, eight hundred years after Moses, records—

"Since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt unto this day, though I have sent unto you all My servants the prophets, yet they hearkened not unto Me, nor inclined their ear, but made their neck stiff" (Jer. 7:25, 26).

And chapter 32, verses 30, 31—

"For the children of Israel and the children of Judah have only done evil in My sight from their youth. This city hath been unto Me a provocation of Mine anger and of My fury from the day that they built it even to this day."

And God through Malachi, the last of the Old Testament prophets, two hundred years later, says (Mal. 3:7, 9)—

"From the days of your fathers ye have turned aside from Mine ordinances and have not kept them. Ye are cursed with the curse, yet ye rob Me, even this whole nation."

The 106th Psalm, and Nehemiah 9, are samples of the way their long history of evil is documented in their national records. But if we read any *modern Jewish newspapers*, or any *secular history of the Jews by a Jew*, we find it the same as any other national history—self-defense, self-pity and self-glorification. *The Bible is obviously not a human production.*

3. THE EXPECTED, REJECTED MESSIAH-PRINCE

All through the Scriptures is woven the expectation that some day a great deliverer would arise to save the Jews from all their troubles and enemies, and rule them in peace and glory.

See Gen. 49:10; Psa. 72; Isa. 9:6; 11:1; 42:1-7; 49:6-9; 52:13; Eze. 21:27; 37:22; Mic. 5:2-5; Zech. 3:8; 6:12-13; 9:9-10.

And yet all through there is the strange parallel foreshadowing that when this long-expected Saviour should come *they would REJECT HIM AS AN IMPOSTER*. How could they fail to understand the 53rd chapter of Isaiah?

“He was despised and we esteemed him not. We did esteem him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted” (Isa. 53:3, 4).

The context of this and the previous chapter makes it clear that it is the great promised Deliverer that is the subject. See Isaiah 52:13 to 53:12. There are several similar references which, when put together and compared with the life of Jesus Christ, give marvelous evidence of divine foreknowledge. Some are shadowy and figurative, but many are crystal clear—

The stone the builders rejected made chief cornerstone (Psa. 118:22);

The stone of stumbling to both houses of Israel (Isa. 8:14);

The exalted servant abhorred by the nation (Isa. 49:7);

The bruising of the woman’s seed by the serpent power (Gen. 3:15);

The treacherous betrayal by the trusted friend (Psa. 41:9);

The smiting of the shepherd and scattering the sheep (Zech. 13:7);

The smiting of the Judge of Israel on the cheek (Mic. 5:1);

The abuse detailed in Isa. 50:6;

The reproach, gall and vinegar of Psa. 69:19-21;

The detailed crucifixion picture of Psa. 22, referred to by Christ as he hung upon the cross (see vs. 1, 6-8, 14-18);

His soul’s (*body’s*) deliverance from hell (*sheol-grave*) in Psa. 16:10;

God’s deliverance of him from the strivings of his own people (2 Sam. 22:44);

The prophecy that, at their final regathering, they shall look on him whom they pierced, and mourn (Zech. 12:10);

The atonement for sin, *cutting off the Messiah*, destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple—all associated in Daniel 9:24-26,

where the *very date* is given in a symbol whose meaning is simple and obvious; Is there any other explanation than that their own Scriptures give?

"Make the ears of this people heavy and shut their eyes lest, seeing and hearing, they return and be healed" (Isa. 6:10—Matt. 13:13-14)

—*divinely inflicted blindness* because of long devotion to evil.

4. SCATTERED, DESPISED AND ABUSED

The fourth item of fulfilled prophecy is that they should be scattered into all nations and be everywhere persecuted and despised. We have seen how Moses told them they would be continually disobedient and bring great punishment on themselves. In Deuteronomy 28 he tells them in much detail what that punishment would be. A few sample verses, still from the Jewish version—

"The Lord shall scatter thee among all peoples, from one end of the earth, even unto the other end of the earth.

"And among these nations shalt thou have no repose, and there shall be no rest for the sole of thy foot, but the Lord shall give thee there a trembling heart.

"And thou shalt grope at noonday, and thou shalt not make thy ways prosperous, and thou shalt be only oppressed and robbed always, and there shall be none to save thee.

"Thou shalt become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword among all the people whither the Lord shall lead thee away" (Deut. 28:64, 65, 29, 37).

Remember—that is a *three thousand five hundred year old extract from their own records*. It would be practically impossible to completely catalog the vast range of cruel, inhuman regulations that have been inflicted down through the ages upon this unhappy people by the Gentiles.

They have been treated and regarded for centuries as something entirely different from all mankind. A host of crushing taxes, restrictions on where they could live, their travel (even over the shortest of distances), their possessions, their occupations, their marriages, their religious ceremonies, whom they could employ, their dress with its compulsory yellow badge—in short, every aspect of their existence has been hammered and twisted *by nations who considered themselves "Christians."*

Every possible contrivance has been devised to degrade and harass them. There is hardly a nation (and this even includes England) that has not—at one time or another—ruthlessly expelled them from its borders. For centuries they had no political rights, no protection or redress at law. Within the last number of years we have witnessed one more gruesome chapter being added to this terrible story that has been going on for two thousand years, *in fulfillment of prophecy*—see also Deut. 4:27; Lev. 26:33; Jer. 9:16; Eze. 12:15; Luke 21:24; Amos 9:4.

5. UTTER DESOLATION IN THE LAND

The fifth item is the remarkable prophecy that Palestine, this once goodliest and fairest of all lands—highly fertile and well wooded—was to become utterly barren and desolate. The Scriptures give us a picture of bed-rock desolation that only centuries of deliberate abuse could accomplish. In Leviticus 26:32, God says—

“I will bring the land into desolation, and your enemies that dwell therein shall be astonished at it.”

Such a state of desolation that *even the enemies* who had been a party to it should be astonished at it! In answer to *how long* the divinely inflicted judicial blindness of the Jewish nation should last, Isaiah records (6:11, 12)—

“Until the cities be waste without inhabitant, and houses without man, and the land become utterly waste, and the Lord have removed men far away, and the forsaken places be many in the midst of the land.”

The U.S. Government soil expert, Walter Lowdermilk, wrote—

“The decline of Palestine began with the first Arab invasion during the seventh century. However, several centuries were to elapse before the state of *utter desolation* was reached.

“The decay of Palestine reached its darkest stage in the four hundred years of Turkish rule, 1517-1918. About 1850, the condition of the land reached its lowest ebb.”

6. NEVER TO BE DESTROYED

Throughout all their long scattering and continual persecution, the Jews were never to be destroyed, but would always remain distinct as a nation. In Jeremiah 30:11, God said to them—

“Though I make a full end of all the nations whither I have scattered thee, YET WILL I NOT MAKE A FULL END OF THEE (Jer. 30:11—A.V., as this point favors the Jew).

The strong, united victors, dwelling in their own lands, were one by one to pass away—the weak, scattered victims were to perpetually remain. What a reversal of all probabilities! But that is *just what has happened!* Peoples and empires have disappeared but the Jew goes on unchanged. He has now nearly completed his *fourth one thousand years*, and he is as strong, active and distinct as ever. (Also Jer. 31:35, 36; Amos 9:8).

7. FINALLY REGATHERED TO THEIR LAND

The Jew is finally to be regathered to his own land, Ezekiel 37:21, 26—

“Thus saith the Lord God: Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the nations whither they are gone, and will gather them on every side and will bring them into their own land. I will set My sanctuary in the midst of them for EVERMORE.”

And in Jeremiah 31:10-12—

“He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him as a shepherd doth his flock. And they shall not sorrow ANYMORE.”

It will be seen from the context in both cases that these prophecies have never yet been fulfilled. Now, if it was highly improbable that this one particular nation—or even *any* nation—should be taken from its own land and scattered throughout the whole world; if it was much *more* improbable that so scattered and separated, they would remain one distinct people; then how *superlatively* improbable is the fulfillment of this prophecy that some day—after ages of homeless wandering—they should *at last return home!*

“NEXT YEAR IN JERUSALEM!”

Every year for two thousand years the Jews throughout the world have—on the solemn Passover night—raised their hands together in the prayer, *“Next year in Jerusalem!”* The world has long since accustomed itself with callous indifference to this wandering people and their pitiful, age-old dream.

And now, after two thousand hopeless years, within our own generation, *before our very eyes*, the strangest chapter of all begins to unfold. The long-locked doors of their ancient home have mysteriously swung open to them, and they have gradually begun to flow back. Could we ask for a more magnificent manifestation of God’s limitless power and knowledge?

HERZL'S "HOPELESS" DREAM

As many readers will remember, there were but a few Jews scattered throughout the land, living in poverty and in subjection to the grinding despotism of the Turk.

Before me is a magazine, "The Christadelphian," dated *April, 1896*. It speaks of a young Jew named Theodor Herzl who had just startled and amused the world with the publication of a wild dream about establishing a modern Jewish state in the old, barren, desolate land of Palestine. Herzl said—

"We are One People. We have honestly striven everywhere to merge ourselves in the social life of surrounding communities, it has not been permitted us. In countries where we have lived for centuries we are still cried down as strangers.

"I am introducing no new idea. On the contrary, it is a very old one. And therein lies its power. It is as old as the people which never—even in the time of bitterest calamity—ceased to cherish it. This is the restoration of the Jewish State.

"It is remarkable that we Jews should have dreamt this kingly dream all through the long night of our history. *WE SHALL LIVE AT LAST, AS FREE MEN, ON OUR OWN SOIL!*"

And he adds, significantly—

"I know full well that I am laying myself open to derision. It will be said that our enterprise is hopeless."

THE PROPHETIC BEACON DISCERNED

Before me is also another magazine, dated June, 1852—nearly fifty years before Herzl's "hopeless" dream. It is a Christadelphian publication entitled, "*The Herald of the Kingdom and the Age to Come*." Therein the editor, John Thomas, on the basis of a study of Bible prophecy, says—

"Before Messiah returns there *must be* a lifting up of an ensign upon the mountains of Judea. There *must be* a resettlement of the land by the Jews to a limited extent before the battle of Armageddon, for it is the prosperity of the Jewish Colony that whets the avarice of the Autocrat.

"It will be a sure and certain sign of the speedy appearing of the Son of Man in power and glory. No one need expect that appearing to be manifested until a Jewish Colony be lifted up *"as an ensign upon a hill."*

And in the September issue of the same year (1852), he says—

"There will be a pre-adventual limited colonization of the country by Jews, under the protectorate of Britain. The pros-

perity of this colony, together with the desire to cripple or subvert the British power in the east, will be the cause of the country's invasion by the Russian "Clay," styled Gog, etc., by Ezekiel. *I consider that this colonization is going on while Russia is engaged in the conquest of the west.*

"However the colonization be brought about, it will be the sign of the time indicative of the speedy coming of Christ. There are signs that the practiced eye can already see; but *that* will be a sign which—if men were not stone-blind—*no one could fail to discern aright.*"

That was written when Palestine was at its lowest ebb of desolation. Today there are *one and a half million* active and enthusiastic Jews in the new State of Israel. A nation that has been politically dead for two thousand years has sprung to life.

Do we realize the tremendous significance of what is happening, or are we among those who must be classed—in the words of our brother Thomas—as "stone-blind"?

BUT FAR MORE IS INVOLVED YET

The *present* gathering is by no means an adequate fulfillment of the *prophesied* great and final assembly of Israel. It is simply the decreed sign that the time for that gathering is at hand. There is *far, far more* to the events attending the latter-day gathering than what we have seen happening so far.

And this is really the heart of our subject. This is why *we* are so interested in the Jew and his affairs. Let us glance at a few prophecies of this latter-day gathering of Israel, and our meaning will soon become very clear. For instance, in Jeremiah 23:5-8, we find—

"Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and A KING SHALL REIGN AND PROSPER, AND SHALL EXECUTE JUDGMENT AND JUSTICE IN THE EARTH. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely . . . They shall dwell in their own land."

CHRIST'S RETURN AN ESSENTIAL ELEMENT

We know this has not happened yet. And we know it *cannot* happen without Christ, for Ezekiel—at the same time as Jeremiah was prophesying—said the throne of David would *REMAIN OVERTURNED* "until *HE* come whose right it is" (Ezek. 21:27).

Apart from the great scope and the specific details of these prophecies, which rule out anything in the past as the fulfill-

ment, we have this stone-wall that they *cannot be fulfilled* before or without the royal and triumphant coming of the great Messiah-Deliverer to rule the earth. Isaiah is filled with prophecies of this glorious time, of which chapter 11 is a good sample—

“And there shall come forth a Rod out of the stem of Jesse (Jesse was the father of David—This is another prophecy of Christ on David’s throne). With righteousness shall he judge the poor, and REPROVE WITH EQUITY FOR THE MEEK OF THE EARTH . . .

“The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord . . .

“In that day the Lord shall set His hand again the second time to recover the remnant of His people . . . He shall assemble the outcasts of Israel and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth” (Isa. 11:1, 4, 9, 11, 12).

LITERAL ISRAEL, AND THE KINGDOM WORLDWIDE

Two things will be noted—

1. We cannot escape the fact that this speaks of literal Israel.
2. It is associated with a *worldwide* reign of righteousness.

Zechariah is another who has much to say about this time—

“I will save My people from the east country and the west country, and I will bring them and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem.

“Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of Hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the Lord.

“Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, In those days it shall come to pass that ten men shall take hold out of all nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you, for we heard that God is with you” (Zech. 8:7, 8, 22, 23).

And in the next chapter (Zech. 9:9-10)—

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; behold, thy King cometh unto thee . . . The battle bow shall be cut off and he shall speak peace to the nations.

“His dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth.”

Such testimonies could be multiplied many fold, for this is the glorious message of all the prophets. Note the inseparable connection between the gathering of Israel and the world-wide kingdom of peace in the following prophecies—Isa. 2:1-4; Psa. 47:4-9; Isa. 60:9-14; Eze. 39:21-27; see 38:23; Psa. 102:13-16, 28; Mic. 4:1-8.

THE REASON—GOD'S GLORY AND PURPOSE

There is one point which should be mentioned, as it is another strong factor in pinning down the *literalness* of the gathering of the *literal* Jews. And also it will answer an obvious question arising out of their age-old disobedience to God—

“Thus saith the Lord God, I do not this for your sake, O house of Israel, BUT FOR MY HOLY NAME which ye have profaned among the nations, which ye have profaned in the midst of them.

“And the nations shall know that I am the Lord, saith the Lord God, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes.

“For I will take you from among the nations, and gather you out of all the countries, and will bring you into your own land” (Ezek. 36:22-24; from the Jews' own version).

That is the reason that God will gather them—to further *His* purpose, demonstrate *His* power, and manifest *His* glory (Psa. 106:8; Rev. 4:11). Ezekiel explains in chapter 20 how the Jews must pass through a terrible latter-day purging and sifting before God can use them.

THE ETERNAL PURPOSE OF THE AGES

God's overall purpose is to develop an eternal, holy people for His Name and glory, one by one, individually. His use of Israel as a *nation* is subordinate to this purpose. *Nationally* He uses them as witnesses and instruments to accomplish His ends. His coming one thousand year kingdom on earth over the mortal nations, in which the Jewish nation will have a leading part, is still carrying forward His eternal purpose of individually selecting and developing a holy people.

When the appointed time comes, God will bring peace and blessing and the true knowledge of Himself to the earth through the instrument of the regathered Jews. In Romans 11, Paul says—

“If the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles, how much more their fullness? . . .

“If the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be but life from the dead? . . .

“And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, there shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob” (Rom. 11:12, 15, 26).

Both their scattering and their regathering are parts of the plan. Paul reasons that if God in His infinite wisdom has brought salvation and hope to Gentiles out of the Jews' disobedience and rejection of their Messiah, how much greater and broader a scope of blessing He will bring out of the promised regathering and Kingdom Age!

THE LONG NIGHT OF GENTILE TIMES

In Luke 21:24, Jesus said, when asked what lay in the future for the Jewish people—

"And they (the Jews) shall fall by the edge of the sword and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles UNTIL the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled" (Lk. 21:24).

He is referring to the destruction of the city and temple foretold by Daniel as following the cutting off of the Messiah. It is clear from this that there was to be a long time of waiting—a time during which Jerusalem was to be trodden under the Gentile heel—a period referred to as the *"times of the Gentiles."*

As long as those times last, there can be no blessing of the nations through Jerusalem—no worldwide divine kingdom of righteousness and peace—and no salvation for God's people, either the watching living or the sleeping dead; for the testimony is that Christ will raise, judge and reward the dead when he comes to set up his kingdom on the earth. We are told—

"Jesus Christ shall judge the living and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom" (2 Tim. 4:1).

And he himself says, regarding the reward in store for his faithful saints—

"He that overcometh and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations. And he shall rule them with a rod of iron" (Rev. 2:26, 27).

That is the part we hope to have in the coming age—the inheritance of the kingdom and ruling the world in righteousness with Christ (Matt. 25:31-34; Lk. 14:14). Therefore we rejoice to see the long down-treading of Jerusalem by the Gentile coming to an end, and the long-scattered people beginning to assemble, as the closing scene of the Gentile period begins to take shape—that is, the events leading up to the destruction of the invading hosts of Russia on the mountains of Israel, followed by Christ's subduing of the whole earth, as foretold by Ezekiel, Daniel, Micah, Joel, Zechariah, etc.

Let us, while time remains, heed the great witness that God has given—through the Jews—of Himself, His purposes and

His requirements. They are, as Isaiah says (18:2), a people terrible from their beginning hitherto. Never an ordinary people like others, but terrible, strange, marvelous, in their times of favor, and terrible in their times of punishment.

To them were entrusted, for all the world, the priceless treasure of the oracles of God. And from this people God raised up the Savior of all mankind. Jesus said (Jn. 4:22)—

"SALVATION IS OF THE JEWS."

Working through this people, God has placed eternal salvation within our reach. He invites us to believe the glorious Gospel of His coming Kingdom on earth (Rom. 1:16; Gal. 1:8-9; Matt. 24:14); to be baptized into that One True Faith (Matt. 28:19; Gal. 3:27-29; John 3:5; 1 Pet. 3:21); and henceforth to devote our entire lives to His service and glory (Rom. 12:1; Eph. 4:2, 17, 23; 1 Tim. 4:15; Matt. 6:19-34).

To the few from among men who do, there will be a great and endless recompense of reward.

The Words of Eternal Life

*"It is required in stewards that a man
be found faithful" (1 Cor. 4:2).*

It is often the simplest lessons that are the hardest to learn, because they cut so deeply into our lives. They cut deeply into, and uproot, the basic principles that the world operates upon, and regards as fundamental wisdom.

The teaching of Jesus was addressed to the task of breaking into this taken-for-granted and almost impervious bottom layer of false human wisdom, and completely clearing the ground so that a unique and different kind of life, based entirely on spiritual principles, might be developed in men for God's eternal use and pleasure.

The actual, recorded words of Jesus are comparatively few. Therefore their individual importance is great, for in this brief body of teaching alone lies life.

"The words that I speak unto you, they are Spirit and they are life" (Jn. 6:63).

Let us not be misled by the *apparent simplicity* of Jesus' words. They will be found to be the deepest, most piercing, and most revolutionary words ever spoken. Once they come into a man's life, and begin to actually *take hold upon it*, they will gradually rob him of everything that the world regards as desirable and worthwhile, but as they clear away the empty, worldly things they will fill his life with satisfactions infinitely more desirable.

It is only those, says Jesus, who lose their lives that truly find life. The life of Jesus cannot be venerated on to the surface of a prosperous, worldly life. It must be a fresh, new creation. New wine cannot be put into old bottles, nor can new patches be put on old worn-out garments.

The words of Jesus before us (Matt. 25) are the parable of the virgins, the parable of the talents, and a description of the day of judgment. Let us weigh every word with the greatest care, and absorb into our lives the life-giving lessons they contain.

Upon these words our eternal destiny depends.

These three incidents teach three related but differing lessons. Simply interpreted, the parable of the virgins declares that to be accepted, we *must* have a constantly-maintained supply of the Spirit of God in our lives, thoughts and actions. We must have a spiritual reservoir, so that our lives will continually give forth a pure, steady, godly light.

The parable of the talents declares that all man's possessions and abilities are the property of God; that they must be used faithfully in God's service; and that a strict accounting of them will be required when life is done.

The judgment scene teaches that unless our life is dedicated to the benefit of others rather than our own advantage and interests, we shall be rejected at the final day.

Let us then consider these vital words of life more particularly. And let us not regard this consideration as an interesting diversion or a pleasant spiritual relaxation. That is the complacent spirit in which Christendom settles into their cool and comfortable pews to have their ears gently tickled. *Properly comprehending these teachings is a matter of life and death.*

* * *

"Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened to ten virgins" (v. 1).

When? *Then*—in that day described in the last two verses of the previous chapter. *Then* the importance and meaning of these words of life will be clear to the dullest perception.

They *all* took their lamps; they *all* went forth to meet the Bridegroom. There is clearly therefore no saving virtue in this alone. They saw a good thing and they wanted to share in its advantages. They joined themselves to the bridal party, and complied with all the *external* requirements.

The foolish ones may have wondered in a light, passing way what the heavy, extra vessel was with which some of the virgins were burdening themselves; or they may have smiled knowingly to themselves that these other fearful ones seemed so absurdly concerned to carry along such a huge, unnecessary supply of oil; or they may have been annoyed by the thought that the others were trying to make *them* look careless and unprepared; or they may not have noticed at all. All such viewpoints exist.

"Five of them were wise, and five were foolish" (v. 2).

Jesus never minimizes the seriousness of the issues involved. The reverse side of the picture is always clearly and prominently presented. There is no blurring of the edges to make it less painful and upsetting to the fleshly mind.

To the foolish virgins the brief message was, "*I know you not.*" That was all. Just that—and a closed door. No second chance—no heed to tearful and doubtless very sincere repentance and intensive resolve to do better. The time had passed for that. Where is the loving and gentle Jesus, who desires all to be

saved, and who came to patiently seek out the lost? *That* Jesus is calling *now*, urging and pleading for adult, mature wisdom and work instead of childish foolishness. Could he do more than lay down his life in intense suffering to emphasize the vital seriousness of the words he said?

To the lazy, self-pleasing servant the verdict was, "*Take everything he has from him, and cast him out.*" Where is the kind and compassionate Savior of men? Who is this dreadful, pitiless figure who casts out his professed and pleading servants? "*Thou knewest that I was an austere man*" (Lk. 19:22).

Austere to whom? Those to whom he says, "*Come, ye blessed of my Father*"—will *they* regard him as austere—cold, distant, unfriendly, implacable in anger? Not at all. His appearance of austerity will depend entirely upon the record of the individual who faces him.

And to those in the last scene who claimed to be his servants, and who had selfishly sought all his benefits, without giving their lives to help his cause and his brethren, come the most terrible words of all—

"Depart from me, YE CURSED, into everlasting (aionian) fire" (v. 41).

No, Jesus did not at all minimize the seriousness of the issue. This heart-piercing teaching of Jesus created two classes among his hearers, just as he intended. There were those that said, "*These are hard sayings; how severe, how discouraging!*"—and they walked no longer with him. Where did they go? Did they find something better or more satisfying?—an easier way to life?

That was the majority—and Jesus let them go. He made no effort to persuade them to stay. He had shown them the power of God, and the way of life—and it annoyed them to consider the change and effort it involved. He had revealed to them eternity—and it was too big for them. They preferred to slip back into the easy darkness. *And he let them go.*

But there was another class. Very few; just a handful. Consider their answer when he turned and put the choice to them—"*Where SHALL we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life*" (Jn. 6:68).

This was the way of life, and there was no other. So they gave their whole heart and soul to laying hold of it, and *did not complain about its hardness, or about "discouragement."*

The cost of the Pearl of Great Price was "*all that he had*" (Matt. 13:46). There are two classes of people illustrated by these

parables. There are those who are anxious to pay the price and wish they could give more; and there are those who begrudge it and would like to get it cheaper.

* * *

"Five of them were wise, and five were foolish."

He does not say "good" and "bad," but "wise" and "foolish." The Spirit through Solomon says—

"Forsake the foolish, and live. If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself; but if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it" (Prov. 9:6, 12).

God ceaselessly urges men to wake up and look at the real facts of life. *Foolishness simply injures the doer of it, and benefits no one.* The course of life He prescribes is the course of wisdom and peace. But they stare emptily at Him and continue in their childish amusements. Does not this show that natural man is the most foolish of all the animal creation?

The Scriptures tell us that many creatures—the ox, the ass, the ant, spider, coney, locust—all are wiser than man.

"The ox knoweth his owner" (Isa. 1:3)—man knows not his Maker.

"The ass knoweth his master's crib" (Isa. 1:3), but man does not recognize the Source of all his benefits.

"Go to the ant," says Solomon (6:6), *"Consider her ways, and be wise."* The ants take advantage of a time of opportunity, and prepare for the future. But man—busy about passing things—fails to store up the *one* thing that will be any good to him when the Bridegroom comes—the spiritual oil in his vessel.

"The conies make their houses in the rocks" (Prov. 30:26), but man prefers to build his vast edifices on the shifting sand.

"The locusts go forth all of them by bands" (v. 27). United and irresistible, nothing can stop the locusts or turn them from their purpose. But how few men display these characteristics in the pursuit of eternal life—the highest possible purpose!

"The spider taketh hold with her hands, and is in kings' palaces" (v. 28). The patient, tireless, spinning industry of the spider. But how few men really and earnestly take hold with their hands, and how few will ever attain to the King's palaces!

Of these four weak creatures, Solomon declares, *"They are exceedingly wise."* They represent in Solomon's allegory the wise virgins, the ones who at present store in their lives and minds the divine treasures of spiritual wisdom which will cause their lamps to shine forth brightly in the day of judgment.

"For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants and delivered unto them his goods" (v. 14).

The heart of this parable lies in those last two words—*HIS goods*. If we grasp the depth of the significance of that expression, and apply it to our lives, we have gained the life-giving wisdom that the parable teaches.

We are "*his servants*" and all things we possess are "*his goods*." He has a great purpose in hand, and "*his servants*" are directed to use "*his goods*" exclusively for that purpose.

There are several instructive lessons in these particular "*words of eternal life*." First, pride and self-esteem are completely ruled out as foolish ignorance. As Paul says—

"What hast thou that thou didst not receive? Why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?" (1 Cor. 4:7).

If to glorify ourselves on account of what we have been given is foolish, what shall we say of glorifying ourselves on account of *sinful misuse* of those things? If we use God-bestowed talents and abilities for our own *personal comfort and advantage*, what will the Lord of those servants say to us when he comes for the reckoning? Jesus says (Lk. 16:11)—

"If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?"

Let us ever remember those two vital expressions: "*his servants—his goods*." Paul says (1 Cor. 4:2)—

"It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful."

That is the first, essential quality that is required in those entrusted with the goods of another—a rigid faithfulness to resist the temptation to minister to personal desire and gratification, and to see that *all* the entrusted goods are used for the master's purpose.

"After a long time the lord of those servants cometh and reckoneth with them" (v. 19).

All activity must have some incentive. The secret of getting anything done is to *create the incentive*. The incentive in spiritual things lies in a strong, ever-present perception of the reality of the future. Of Jesus it is recorded (Heb. 12:2)—

"For the joy set before him he endured the cross, despising the shame."

That was his incentive—his driving force. His teaching is largely concerned with creating an incentive in men to follow the course of divine wisdom; impressing them with how much is to be gained by following the right course—how much to be

lost by following the wrong—how much more *desirable* is the beauty of holiness than the ugliness of the natural mind.

The time of reckoning is bound to come. It will either be a glad opportunity to lay before the Master the fruits of a life of loving labor, or else it will be a time of intense remorse and regret for past neglect and foolishness. Jesus is trying in these parables to get men to think about that time, and get ready for it. His words are hard words—*certainly* they are hard words! Would it be kind for him to give smooth and comfortable words, when only hard and clear words truly and fairly reveal the facts that must some day be faced by all?

The unfaithful servant is called for his account. His first words are, "*I knew thou art a hard man.*" He is obsessed with this idea of "hardness." He has no real love or enthusiasm for his master's work. He resents being told what he must do, or having his pleasure interfered with. He did not realize that the master was concerned solely with the servants' own welfare, and was just *testing them as a basis for future gifts and honor.*

* * *

"Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom". . .

"Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire" (vs. 34 and 41).

There are the two sides of the picture. Some brethren and sisters will hear one, and some the other. This is a terrible reality, and we should live constantly in the shadow of it. There is no need for *anyone* to hear the latter message. That is the great pity of it. God desires that none should be rejected. This part of the picture is so utterly unnecessary and avoidable. These words of Jesus are words of life—to *some*, the wise.

What constitutes the difference between the two classes in this scene? It is this. One group fed, clothed and visited Christ's suffering brethren; the other did not. These are simple words, but let us not be deceived—they go right to the roots of life. They do not mean just making a pleasant hobby of a few visits and acts of charity. They refer to a basic, consistent, full-time *course of life*—a course that is related to the storing up of the spirit oil and the faithful use of the master's talents.

The natural man serves himself. His basic law is to do well by himself. He is primarily concerned with his own welfare and security. His labors are directed toward the gratification of his lusts, greed and pride. This is not only regarded as legitimate and commendable, but it is taken for granted as a first principle of life. The natural man is *self-centered*. With the spiritual man,

God is the center, and his own present advantage or profit is incidental.

The natural man is wrapped up in his own interests; the spiritual man is wholly absorbed with the things that God is doing. He is so obsessed with the glories of the future, so anxious to learn all about God's ways and be useful in the working out of them, that passing things hold little interest for him.

These are the two classes Jesus is speaking of. The accepted are surprised at his warm words of commendation, for they are painfully aware of how little they have actually done. The others are terribly surprised at their rejection. They had been so wrapped up in their own perfectly legitimate interests and activities that they had never stopped to think about the possible application of this parable to themselves. They were "in the Truth," they attended the meetings, they knew the sick were being visited fairly regularly and they even occasionally visited them themselves. And not only that, but out of their comfortable surplus they had given the Master back what *they* considered was a very generous percentage of his *own* talent!

* * *

Let us remember that it was just two days before his crucifixion that Jesus spoke these solemn words of life. He had said—

"Whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it" (Matt. 16:25).

The power of Christ's words lies in the life—and the death—by which he illustrated them. That life and death we meet each week to remember. The purpose of this institution is to remind us of the tremendous sacrifice he made for the sake of the things he believed and taught.

Having, by his own life, put the divine and more excellent way into perfect practice, he gave that life to lay a basis for the acceptance of those few among men who should faithfully follow in his steps.

Let us store up in our hearts his words of life about the foolish virgins, the unfaithfully-handled talent, and the rejected brethren and sisters at the judgment seat.

Matthew 27

In our readings in Matthew today and tomorrow (Matt. 26-27) we are at the center point of all history. Most history is utterly meaningless and unimportant—the squabbles of animals in a jungle—but these chapters record the most important and meaningful event that ever happened.

If we read these two chapters every day, and meditated upon them, it could make the difference between acceptance and rejection at the judgment seat of Christ.

Let us never take acceptance for granted. It is only for the very few who give themselves *wholly* to God—who live and think, all the time, *entirely* differently from how they would naturally live and think apart from the Word of God.

The attainment of salvation and eternal life is not hard. It is very easy. It is actually the *easiest* possible way of life, because it is in harmony with truth and reality. Jesus said—

“My yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:30).

But easy as it is, it does not just happen. It requires a certain *specific* course of life—clearly explained in God’s Book of Life.

It may be very easy to get to a certain place—much easier than to get to some other place. But unless we actually put our feet on the right path, and move steadily along that path, we shall never get there, no matter how easy it is to do so.

Because God has made the way so easy, so sensible, so reasonable, is why the judgment for *neglect* is so severe—

“Cast the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 25:30).

There is no middle ground. What he says is either, *“Come, ye BLESSED,”* or *“Depart, ye CURSED, into everlasting fire,”* the judgment fire of the terrible day of the Lord.

Why no middle ground? Because the way of life is so easy. There is absolutely no excuse for failure if we give ourselves completely to it. It is just a matter of finding out *exactly* what is required, and *doing* it.

Just very simple submission and obedience, as we expect and take for granted from any well-trained dog. A *child* can understand it—but who will *do* it?

The required obedience covers many aspects—actually *every* act and aspect of life—but none are too hard for the simplest of minds to grasp, such as—

“Love not the world” (1 Jn. 2:15).

“Come out and be separate” (2 Cor. 6:17).

"Always abound in the work of the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58).

"Rejoice evermore" (1 Thess. 5:16).

"Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17).

"In everything give thanks" (1 Thess. 5:18).

"Present your bodies a living sacrifice" (Rom. 12:1).

"Be ye holy, as God is holy" (1 Pet. 1:16).

"Meditate on *THESE* things: give yourselves *WHOLLY* to them" (1 Tim. 4:15).

"Make *NO* provision for the flesh" (Rom. 13:14).

"Let your speech be *ALWAYS* with grace" (Col. 4:6).

"Put away *ALL* anger" (Eph. 4:31).

"Be gentle to all men" (2 Tim. 2:24).

There are many, many more, and they are all easy. It's just a matter of being sensible enough to get *doing* them instead of doing something else. There will be momentary *failures*—many of them—but there is absolutely no excuse for final failure, for all that God asks is our best.

He never requires anything beyond our ability. All he asks is *everything* we have, which is perfectly reasonable, and actually the very *least* He *could* ask under the circumstances, for it to really mean anything at all.

The gift is so great, and what we have to offer him is so utterly puny, that for Him to ask—and for us to give—anything less than *everything* would make a mockery of the whole thing.

All the things that God asks of us are the things that enlightened love and common sense would *want* to give anyway. The truly spiritual mind—the intelligent godly mind—could not possibly be *satisfied* in giving anything less. It is desolated and embarrassed that it has *so little* to give to manifest its love and devotion and thanksgiving.

Devotion always wants to *give*. It gets its joy and peace in *giving*. It is always eagerly striving to give more.

This is why the cleavage is so clear-cut at the judgment seat—

"Come ye blessed: Depart ye cursed."

When we have to do with God, the issues are so great that there just *cannot* be any halfway. If we do not *eagerly* go all the way, we just haven't learned about Him at all.

God asks nothing we can't do—but *everything* that we can. The basic requirement is eager desire.

* * *

The chapter before us records the final, terrible sufferings of Christ in his loving obedience to His Father. These sufferings

should be ever before our minds. I do not wish to dwell on their details, but we should all be fully familiar with *all* the dreadful details of scourging and crucifixion, and we should think upon them often, to keep our minds in the healthy track of humility and gratitude.

There are many puzzles in Matthew 27—strange enigmas that give us partial hints of so much that is not revealed, as Pilate's wife's dream; Joseph of Arimathaea, who suddenly appeared just this once, and just at the right time and never again; the thief on the cross, a manifestation of almost incredible faith and comprehension from a dying criminal; the deeply-impressed Roman Centurion; the dark tangled picture of the traitor Judas; the dead saints who rose and appeared to many; Simon the Cyrenean who suddenly, out of nowhere, was thrust into the very center of all history; the strange words of Christ in his agony—

"My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

Pilate himself, a vile and wicked man caught up in depths that frightened him, struggling to set Jesus free.

All these lead to both profitable *and* unprofitable lines of thought: *profitable* if in the direction of a *better understanding of basic principles*; of *getting closer to the mind of God*; of a *beneficial effect* on our *walk and character*: but *unprofitable* if just aimless, merely curious, dead-end speculation.

It is to be noted (v. 3) that Judas "*repented*." He regretted what he had done: he recognized and confessed his sin. But it was merely the repentance of despair: a natural fleshly repentance. It did not lead him to do good. Repentance must go all the way to complete change to mean anything.

How different it was with Peter's repentance. And how differently was he treated!

And then the strikingly hypocritical contrast between vs. 4 and 6. To the statement—

"I have betrayed innocent blood,"

the Jewish leaders replied—

"What is that to us?"

But to the idea of putting the betrayal money into the treasury, oh, no, that cannot be done, it is not lawful!

How easy it is for us all to strain out a gnat and swallow a camel! There is no basic *logic* or *balance* or *reason* to the natural human mind. It is "*deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked*." It can *believe* whatever it wishes. It can *justify* whatever it wishes.

Pilate presents a strange figure in this confrontation. We know, from Scripture and from history, that he was a wicked and evil man. Yet he struggles mightily to free Christ, three times protesting his innocence.

The message from his wife was just what was needed to cause him to do what had to be done. It had to bring out those terrible words—

"His blood be on us and our children! . . . We have no king but Caesar!"

It had to bring about the choice between Christ and Barabbas. The multitude had to be aroused to a frenzy bordering on riot before Pilate could overcome his fears and superstitions.

The Romans—perhaps the most practical and most deadly efficient people of all time—were deeply superstitious about dreams and omens auguries.

Pilate wanted to release Jesus. He had a nameless fear of this strange figure of such great dignity and self possession, who claimed to be the Son of God, and of whose works he had doubtless heard much. He knew the leaders had delivered him up because of envy (v. 18)—envy because of Jesus' power and popularity with the people.

Here again, over-ruling providence takes a hand in events. This was the Passover—the greatest, in the Jews' eyes, of the three great feasts when all must assemble at Jerusalem.

And it was the custom for the Romans to release one prisoner to them on this occasion. And the time for that release has *just exactly* arrived. Matthew says—

"Therefore when they were GATHERED TOGETHER"

—that is, the whole multitude in Jerusalem, or at least as many as could crowd into the available space for the occasion. The Revised Version of Mark 15:8 (which is more accurate here than the A. V.) gives the same picture—

"And the multitude GOING UP, began to desire him to do as he had ever done unto them."

How wonderful that these events so marvelously converge—the nation unconsciously assembled to face the choice between a murderous bandit and the sinless Son of God.

Pilate clearly felt here was a way of escape. He knew Jesus was popular. He had gone everywhere doing good, and just a few days before, the multitudes had worshipfully hailed him with *"Hosanna to the Son of David."* But *now* the multitude said, *"crucify him,"* and chose Barabbas the robber.

Why the sudden change? The chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude. But how were they *able* to? Jesus stood before them a pitiful figure—horribly beaten and wounded, bound and humiliated—and not doing any miracles—a meek, passive, uncomplaining, submissive sheep. He had claimed to be the Son of God—and here he stood helpless and powerless.

This was not the kind of king the mob wanted. They were not interested in his goodness and kindness and holiness, and gentle words of love and life.

“Give us Barabbas, a leader, a real man, a fighter—Barabbas who dared to lead an insurrection against the power of Rome.”

The chief priests really thought they were saving the nation—one man must die *“lest the Romans take away OUR place and nation.”*

But it was the Barabbas class that finally brought on the Roman armies and the desolation of the land, and the awful horrors of the final siege and destruction of Jerusalem.

Pilate tried in vain to stem the tide, pleading with them, but (v. 24) he could see the ugly and ominous beginnings of a riot brewing, so he took water, and washed his hands, and said—

“I am innocent of the blood of this just person.”

And the mob cried those terrible words of their own doom—

“His blood be upon us and our children.”

So he gave him over to their will.

* * *

In preparation for the Crucifixion (v. 34) they offered him a stupefying drink, to *dull* his mind and reduce the agony of the terrible ordeal. But he would not drink it. The cup *he* chose was that prepared by his Father—full, conscious, patient, obedience right to the very end. There could not be the slightest degree of evading the divinely appointed path. He must manifest clear, unconfused perfection right till the final moment.

The *way* he accepted this terrible torture was all-important. It was for the eternal record. It was the final, climaxing event of an absolutely perfect life. His mind must be clear. He had things to say: to man and to God.

There are seven things recorded that he said on this occasion—manifesting throughout perfect self-control, perfect submission, perfect obedience. One moment of failure would have spoiled the whole age-long purpose of God. What a weight lay upon him. The weight of all the sin and sorrow and eternal destiny of mankind.

Here is the secret of the bloody sweat of Gethsemane, and the terrible cry, "*My God, why hast thou forsaken me?*"

Some have scoffed at his fears and tears, pointing to others who have gone bravely and defiantly to terrible tortures and horrible deaths. But how little they know of the *real* struggle! For thirty-three long years he had walked the agonizing tight-rope of perfect obedience. Just a few hours more of perfect obedience in thought, word and action.

* * *

There are recorded seven statements of Jesus that were spoken from the cross.

Luke 23:34—"*Father, forgive them.*"

Luke 23:43—"*Thou shalt be with me in paradise.*"

John 19:26, 27—"*Behold thy son! Behold thy mother!*"

Matthew and Mark—

"*My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken Me?*" (Psa. 22:1).

John 19:28—"*I thirst.*"

John 19:30—"*It is finished.*"

Luke—"*Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit*" (Psa. 31:5).

No one gospel gives more than three of them. Only one of them—the central and most striking one is recorded in more than one single gospel. Pieced together, they form a remarkably symmetrical, and obviously designed and intended pattern.

Luke gives three; John gives three more; Matthew and Mark together give one. The first, central, and last are prayers—the first and last addressed "*My Father*," the central one "*My God*."

The first two concern care for others. The last four concern Christ himself—although all that concerns him concerns everyone, for he is the foundation of all. The central prayer and the last prayer are quotations from the Psalms.

The *first*, recorded only by Luke, is—

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

This is fittingly the first, and it appears to have occurred at the beginning, when they cruelly nailed him to the cross.

They *did* not know what they were doing, though they *should* have known. They were blinded by the flesh. They had not sought the light to give them light. Many *were* forgiven, when they realized and repented. Peter said, on the day of Pentecost (Acts 3:15-19)—

"*Ye killed the Prince of Peace . . . Through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers . . . Repent, therefore, and BE converted.*"

The *second* utterance, also recorded only by Luke, was the glorious promise to the thief on the cross. We are specifically told that one was on his *right* hand, and one on his *left*, and we cannot help but feel sure that—in the wisdom and providence of God—*this* was the one on the *right* hand.

Actually, he was not a thief. It is a mistranslation. The New Testament throughout makes a very clear *distinction* between *thieves* and *robbers*, which the Revised Version consistently follows, though the Authorized Version does not. He was a *robber*, not a *thief*. A thief uses stealth, secretly; a robber uses violence, openly.

This may seem not much of a difference, or it may seem to make the use even worse. But it does give us a much clearer and more understandable picture.

Barabbas was a robber (*same* word) and a murderer. He had made insurrection against Rome. He was what today would be called a terrorist, a freedom fighter, a guerrilla. As today, these have *always* been a mixed and motley crew. We remember the type of some who assembled with David when he was a fugitive.

As today, some are high-minded patriots, some are common criminals, and some are somewhere in between. It is most likely that the robbers crucified with Christ were part of the robber Barabbas' band of insurrectionists against Rome. It may have been Pilate's revenge for their choice of Barabbas over Christ.

We cannot exonerate the repentant robber as a patriot. He *was* a robber. He himself recognized that his punishment was due and just. But as a robber and not a thief we can see his picture and background better. He quite likely had justified his robbery and violence to himself as part of his patriotic conflict, as so many do today.

One of the disciples had been of such a band—Simon Zelotes; Simon the Zealot. The Zealots were a wild party of violent insurrectionists.

It appears this robber at first joined with the other in reviling Christ. It is possible to take the record otherwise, but it is more natural to take it that way. Here is the importance of Christ's deportment on the cross. It convinced the robber, just as it convinced the Roman centurion in charge—

"Truly this man was the Son of God."

This robber clearly knew of Christ and his doctrine. He said, *"This man hath done NOTHING amiss,"* and he spoke of Christ's coming kingdom.

He manifests one of the most remarkable cases of discerning faith in all Scripture. When the disciples had fled in bewildered despair, and he and Christ hung dying in agony, he understood, and believed.

It is a deeply sobering thought that, though he repented and was forgiven by Christ and promised eternal life, still he must endure the continuation of the crucifixion, even to the barbarous smashing of his leg bones with clubs, to make sure there was no escape or recovery when he was taken down.

The *third* utterance was to Jesus' mother and to John—loving consideration and provision, even in the midst of his agony. Only John mentions this.

These three seem to be quite early—certainly during the first three hours, before the darkness came.

The last four were at the end, at the ninth hour. First, that strange, central, key cry—

"My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

—recorded by Matthew and Mark.

What did it mean? He knew all his life, from the 22nd Psalm, that this moment would come. He knew all his life this moment must come, and, that he would in anguish make this cry. This was the climax of his lifelong struggle. From his birth, and especially from his baptism, he had been filled with the Holy Spirit. God dwelt *in him*—

"God was in him, reconciling the world unto Himself."

He was thus God manifest in the flesh. He could say—

"He that hath seen me hath seen the Father."

There was a perfect oneness, a perfect union, a perfect fellowship. He had never known anything else. But now the time had come for a brief sundering and the time had come for the Father's presence to leave him. It was a moment of desolation and anguish, expected and braced for, but still a shock in his weakened agony that called forth that bitter cry.

But that last hurdle was now passed. He said (the *fifth* utterance) *"I thirst,"* recorded by John. What a terrible choking, burning thirst it must have been to stand out above the torture of crucifixion! But he needed one last moment of refreshment. He had two more things to say.

Matthew, Mark and Luke all tell us that Jesus cried with a loud voice. (The word is usually translated "great"). It was a cry of triumph and joy—as loud as he could cry in his weakened condition.

But only John tells us what he cried—

"It is finished"

—not ended, but completed, accomplished.

His work was done—accomplished, fulfilled. The terrible thirty-three year ordeal of agonized perfection in struggle with the flesh was over. The foundation of righteousness was laid; the way of life opened up; sin and death conquered, and their power forever broken.

The *seventh* and *final* utterance, which Luke gives us, was—

"Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit."

This is from Psalm 31, a psalm of both deep distress and joyful, thankful, confident worship and praise.

His next conscious moment was glorious resurrection and then all powerful life forevermore.

If I May But Touch Him

"Behold a gluttonous man and a winebibber!" (Lk. 7:34).

We are apt, in our fancy, as we read the story of Jesus, to envision a quiet, majestic figure slowly traveling about Judea and Galilee with respectful throngs following him, a person at least of general respect, if not of wholehearted general approval. *But this is not the true picture.* Multitudes thronged him, truly. But they were not the "respectable" people. The respectable people, unless they were of exceptional courage, came secretly at night, like Nicodemus, if they came at all. The respectable people whispered, as they viewed his simple followers—

"Behold a glutton and a winebibber: a friend of publicans and sinners!" (Lk. 7:34).

The "respectable" were afraid to be associated with him, for—

"The Jews had agreed already that if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue" (Jn. 9:22).

And because the man who was born blind confessed him, they *did* cast him out. The respectable people could say, with triumphant contempt (Jn. 7:48, 49)—

"Have ANY of the RULERS or the PHARISEES believed on Him? But this people who knoweth not the Law are accursed."

And it is further recorded (Jn. 12:42, 43)—

"Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees THEY DID NOT CONFESS HIM, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God."

It is clear that to confess him meant ostracism from respectable society. As Isaiah tells us (53:3), he was not only rejected, but *despised*—

"A reproach of men, and DESPISED of the people" (Psa. 22:6).

"Him whom man DESPISETH, him whom the nation abhorreth" (Isa. 49:7).

He, no less than Paul (1 Cor. 4:12, 13), was—

"Reviled, defamed, made as the filth of the world, and the offscouring of all things."

And those that followed him were told to expect the same—

"If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?" (Matt. 10:25).

"Blessed are ye when men shall revile you for my sake"
(Matt. 5:11).

But—

"WOE unto you when all men shall speak well of you!"
(Lk. 6:26).

* * *

In Mark 4, we have first the parable of the sower, emphasizing the three great dangers to faith. First, the fowls of the air, *organized opposition*, the specious falsehoods of men, the deceits of the adversary who snatch away the seed before it has time to take root. Then the *poor, thin, shallow ground*—no depth, no real grip on the truth, no stability or constancy. And lastly, the *cares of this world*, the deceitfulness of riches, the thousand and one little things that can, almost unnoticed, steal away, piece by piece and day by day, our precious time and opportunities, until at last we look up in dismay and find ourselves far from our goal and the day nearly spent.

Then the storm on the sea, and the fear of the disciples—

"Master, carest thou not that we perish?" (Mk. 4:38).

They had many lessons to learn by experience, and experience is usually hard. Yet each experience, whether we fail or succeed, can be a stepping stone forward, *if we are rightly exercised by it*. Even if we fail still our failure can be profitable and useful: subsequent reflection can tell us why, and can also impress us with the unsatisfactory and depressing character of a past whose milestones are instances of weakness—thus giving added incentive to overcome. So even here—

"ALL things work together for good to them that love God" (Rom. 8:28).

Then when he stilled the storm with a word, they feared even the more, because of the powers which they saw and did not understand

"What manner of man is this?" (Matt. 8:27).

* * *

"He was asleep, in the hinder part of the ship" (Mk. 4:38).

This tells us many things. It speaks first of his perfect peace of mind. He had many troubles, but no worries; countless sorrows, but no anxiety.

Then it speaks of the fatigue that would make sleep possible upon such an occasion, tossed about in a small boat on a rough sea. And it gives us a glimpse of the life he led—unsettled and wandering—no fixed dwelling place, or mode of existence—

spending long nights in prayer—sleeping when the opportunity afforded. He enjoyed none of the external elements of rest and peace, but was the greatest example of them inwardly.

“My peace I give unto you” (Jn. 14:27).

“Come unto me and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28).

Then he adds lest we should harbor an illusion—

“Not as the world giveth, give I unto you” (Jn. 14:27).

The world would not call it rest, nor would they recognize his peace. He, even more truly and deeply than Paul, could say—

“I have learned, in whatever state I am, therewith to be content” (Phil. 4:11).

A perfect mastery of the mind over external circumstances. His peace did not consist in *ignoring* the circumstances, or excluding the facts from his consciousness, or not caring about them.

It consisted in *the confidence that whatever came, he was ready, with God’s help, to face it*, and make the best of it; and in knowing that in all things he conducted himself in perfect harmony with the will of God. He said (Jn. 8:29)—

“I do always those things that please the Father.”

That was his peace. Consider the whole statement—

“He that sent me is with me; the Father hath not left me alone; FOR I do always those things that please Him.”

Many times he said that: *“I am not alone.”* That was his anchor and confidence through every storm. *“I am not alone.”* God said in the beginning, *“It is not good for man to be alone.”* For the first Adam, the natural man, He made one provision, but it remained for the Second Adam to demonstrate the full truth and depth of the statement. *“I am not alone.”*

Though all the world was against him, he was still in the majority: though all his companions forsook him, he was not alone. As the last hour approached, he said (Jn. 16:32, 33)—

“Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I AM NOT ALONE, because the Father is with me. These things have I spoken to you that in me ye might have peace.”

When the ship reached the eastern side of the sea, the country of the Gadarenes, the incident of the swine occurred, in connection with the curing of the maniac.

“And they were afraid . . . and they began to pray to him to depart out of their coasts” (Mk. 5:15, 17).

It seems incredible that any should *beg him to depart*, after seeing a demonstration of his healing power. But they were

afraid—afraid of the implications that that power carried with it. For it worked both ways. He not only healed the maniac, but he destroyed the swine. Therefore, knowing themselves, they wanted him to leave them alone. With such a power among them, there was no knowing where it would stop, or what it would search out. *The works of darkness could not live within the circle of his light.*

Wherever he went, the issue of right and wrong—righteousness and evil—was joined and could not be evaded. He would not let it rest.

He came proclaiming righteousness and the power of God; the loving and perfect and self-sacrificing way of the spiritual mind. All the specious arguments and attempt to confound the issue and justify the flesh that were put forward were gently but relentlessly exposed. The common people heard him gladly—though few comprehended the depth of his teaching.

But those who began to perceive the full implication of his words, and did not want to face it, begged him to *go away and leave them alone.*

And the vested interests and ruling classes persistently sought to discredit and destroy him, because in quiet, everyday words he preached a revolution that was deeper, more fundamental and more searching than man has ever conceived.

* * *

He returned again to the other side of the lake, and among the throng that followed him was the woman with the issue of blood (Mk. 5:25). Consider this woman's faith. She felt that, though she knew not how, if she could only *get close enough to Christ*, the evil would of itself disappear.

"If I may but touch him"!

And that indeed is true, and is the simple, universal solution to all our problems. Other solutions may be quite logical and convincing, but they are *lifeless*, and we find when the issue comes that they lack the power to carry us through. We are convinced, and confess it, but we are not moved, transformed and regenerated.

As Paul says, law merely convinces us of sin, and leads to the exclamation—

"O, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom. 7:24).

We must have the personal impetus that comes of a vivid loving perception of and close proximity to Christ, as a living person. Otherwise the *path of right*, as opposed to the *path of*

pleasure, is an intolerable and seemingly meaningless burden. Paul found his incentive in his *affection for Christ, and his desire to approach him* (Phil. 3:8; 4:13)—

*"I count all things but loss that I may WIN CHRIST . . .
I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth
me."*

He expressed unlimited confidence in this power—more than equal to all circumstances (Rom. 8:35-37)—

"Who shall separate us from the LOVE OF CHRIST? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?—Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors THROUGH HIM THAT LOVED US . . . As it is written, FOR THY SAKE we are killed all the day long."

That is the keynote—"For thy sake." We must have a living, personal reason; someone we love and are striving to please. We are constituted that way.

* * *

"God, FOR CHRIST'S SAKE, hath forgiven you," says Paul (Eph. 4:32). Christ *for our sakes*, laid down his life, John records, (1 Jn. 3:16). And we, *for his sake*, serve God. And it is in doing things for his sake that gives them efficacy and meaning.

"He that loses his life FOR MY SAKE shall find it" (Matt. 10:39).

"Everyone that hath forsaken all in this life FOR MY SAKE shall inherit everlasting life" (Matt. 19:29).

The incentive throughout is personal, and Paul, impressed by the transforming nature of this incentive, always bases his appeals upon it. And of himself he says—

"I TAKE PLEASURE in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, FOR CHRIST'S SAKE" (2 Cor. 12:10).

"Unto you it is GIVEN—it is granted, you have the honor, pleasure and privilege, in the behalf of Christ—not only to believe on him, but also to suffer FOR HIS SAKE" (Phil. 1:29).

This is not just an extravagant flight of rhetoric. Paul literally means what he said. In the primitive and pure ecstasy of the early church, it is recorded (Acts 5:41)—

"They REJOICED that they were counted worthy to suffer for his Name."

We have all, in some small measure (and many doubtless in larger measure), experienced the pleasure of pain for another's sake, and the joy of the bond that it creates.

So she felt that if she could get close enough to Christ, all would be well. His power would envelope her, and evil would flee from his glorious, healing presence. He would take her problem upon himself, if she would but carry it to him. *"If I can but touch him, I shall be whole."* And so it was. Jesus said—

"I am the true vine. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit in itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in me . . . without me ye can do nothing" (Jn. 15:1-5).

Without him we can do nothing. We strive mightily and get nowhere. Like the disciples, we row all night and accomplish nothing, unless he is in the ship. Unless we actually establish a vital connection between him and ourselves, we remain just ordinary people, living in an ordinary way, and finally dying the common death. The connection must be personal and actual—not just apparent, or mechanical, or superficial.

It is through the recorded Word that the contact is made and maintained. That is the medium of intercourse and communion—

"If ye abide in me, and MY WORDS, abide in you, ye shall bear much fruit" (Jn. 15:7, 8).

"My words." We have the recorded Word before us. That is something real and tangible that we can hold in our hands, and any advance into the spiritual realm must be through that. We cannot sit and commune with God on our own terms. We must seek His presence where *He* chooses to be found, and through the medium *He* provides. That is why the Psalms contain so much on the theme—

"O, how love I Thy Law! How sweet are Thy words to my taste!" (Psa. 119:97, 103).

That is the frame of mind to which we must educate ourselves—by prayer, and study, and meditation. And we must never rest content until it takes complete hold of us.

* * *

A little later (ch. 6) in the course of his travelling, he came to his native city Nazareth. Their reaction to him is strange. They did not deny his wisdom and power. Rather it was that very wisdom and power that annoyed them!—

"From whence hath this man these things? And what wisdom is this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands? . . . AND THEY WERE OFFENDED AT HIM" (Mk. 6:2, 3).

How utterly illogical! But how typically human!

"And he marvelled because of their unbelief" (v. 6).

Even he, who knew all men, and knew what was in man—he marvelled because of the unyielding hardness of their unbelief. The evidence which was forced upon them only infuriated them, and the only solution they could think of to relieve themselves of the problem he presented was to destroy him.

He marvelled that hearts could be so bitter and obstinate in the very presence of the power and goodness of God—that the flesh could be so unreasonable, and so blind to itself. But such is the material with which we each have to work in ourselves. The Spirit through Solomon declared—

“He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool” (Prov. 28:26).

—and we must admit that once a man has been enlightened to the destructive deceptiveness of the desires of the flesh, this verdict is so true.

How easy it is to be blind to ourselves! How necessary is a constant, prayerful searching of the Word, and unsparing self-examination in the light of it! How natural to be obsessed with the faults of others!

Isaiah—at the beginning of his prophecy, when he speaks of the glorious day of the Lord when all human things shall come into judgment, and all that is out of harmony with the Truth shall be destroyed—says that in the great day of judgment they shall cast their idols *“to the MOLES and to the BATS.”*

Why especially *moles and bats*? Considering the scriptural evaluation of the flesh, we can see why such are chosen. These two are the most outstanding examples in the animal kingdom of the flesh’s primary characteristic—they love darkness rather than light.

That principle goes far deeper than we self-righteously realize. *Anything foreign to the pure and gentle Spirit mind is darkness.*

The mole spends his time in darkness, burrowing in the dirt, undermining, digging away in secret, and he is content. He literally has eyes but cannot see. Bats, too, have a strong aversion to light. They hide away in the daytime and confine their activities to the night. And both are classed as unclean creatures.

Such is the flesh, but the picture would not be complete without presenting another angle. There is no cause for despair, or even regret, that we are made so. All is for a good purpose—

“The creation was made subject to vanity by reason of Him Who hath subjected the same IN HOPE, because the creation itself also shall be delivered from the

bondage of corruption into the GLORIOUS LIBERTY of the children of God” (Rom. 8:20, 21).

And continuing the same line of thought, Paul says—
“*And we KNOW that ALL things work together for good to them that love God” (Rom. 8:28).*

Our present state is a necessary step in the eternal purpose. It is *not* a gloomy picture, but rather one of bright promise and hope. The only danger is *refusal to face and admit the facts*—running *from* the light—drawing back fearfully into the darkness—hesitating to concede the miserable deceptiveness of the flesh—excusing it and glorifying it—calling its vicious traits by fair and flattering names. Paul flatly declares (Rom. 7:18)—

“In me—that is, in my flesh—dwelleth NO GOOD THING.”

Frankly and honestly admit that to ourselves, and at least we are off to a good start.

* * *

A little later in chapter 6 the death of John the Baptist is recorded—him of whom Jesus said (Matt. 11:11)—

“There hath not risen a greater prophet among men.”

He was a voice crying in the wilderness—a voice that the powers of Israel refused to accept, but dared not deny. They asked Jesus, “*Who sent you, and gave you your authority?*” And he answered, “*WHO SENT JOHN, and gave HIM his authority?*” That answered their question, but they would not face it.

John did no miracles, but his pure voice from the wilderness pierced the consciences of the people. For fearlessly testifying to corruption in high places, he was shut up in prison, and finally murdered. When Jesus heard of it, he departed into a desert place apart, deeply affected by the news of John’s death, and desirous of being alone. To his disciples he said (Matt. 17:12, 13)—

“Elias is come, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall the Son of man suffer of them. Then the disciples understood that he spoke unto them of John the Baptist.”

But when they reached the desert place, they found that the multitude had guessed their destination and were there waiting for them. Seeing them, he had compassion on them, and foregoing his own privacy and rest, he set himself to teach them about his Father. Afterwards, by a miracle, he feeds them, and verse 40 (Mk. 6) gives an interesting thought—

“They sat down in ranks, by hundreds, and by fifties.”

Not as a haphazard crowd, but an orderly assembly. There is always beauty and dignity in orderliness and arrangement.

All God's works are marvels of order and precision. Nothing, however minute or unimportant, is slipshod or carelessly done. And this characteristic struck observers in regard to Jesus. In the next chapter, Mark 7, we read that they exclaimed—

"Behold, he doeth all things well!" (v. 37).

That was the stamp of God dwelling in him. Even in this incident of feeding the multitude, he arranges it with a pleasing orderliness. No crowding, no confusion, but—

"He commanded them to make all sit down by companies upon the green grass. And they sat down in ranks, by hundreds and by fifties" (Mk. 6:39, 40).

If he was to be a party to the transaction, it would have to be done with becoming decorum. And the multitudes, finding themselves part of quiet and orderly assembly, would be impressed with the meaning and dignity that is possible to human nature when it is controlled and directed by the wisdom of God.

There was nothing slipshod or haphazard in Jesus' life. Though he wandered homeless, taking no thought for the morrow, his was actually the most intensely purposeful life ever lived. We must not judge by appearances, or common standards.

The priest and Levite, hurrying between Jerusalem and Jericho, were following a schedule, but it was the Samaritan who had a real purpose in life.

But there is a distinction between true dignity and false. As Jesus rode into Jerusalem, the whole multitude of the disciples began spontaneously to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice (Lk. 19:37). And some of the Pharisees said—

"Master, rebuke thy disciples" (v. 39).

According to their standards of etiquette, that was not a fitting way for people to act. They were completely unmoved by the significance of the occasion. They said the same thing when the children praised him in the Temple.

The Pharisees were always there to cavil over trifles, and to throw an ugly, jealous shadow over the pure joy of the occasion. Going a little further, we find them criticizing the disciples for eating with unwashed hands.

This attitude finally brought upon them the most scathing denunciation that is recorded in the Scriptures, filling twenty-six burning verses in Matthew 23—

"Woe unto you, scribes, Pharisees, HYPOCRITES!" (v. 13).

Primarily following Mark's record, but with reference to the others, we have travelled briefly with Jesus.

It is remarkable how the four gospels supplement each other and afford a depth and interest that one continuous narrative could not give. There have been many attempts to fuse the four accounts into one story, but the results are always disappointing.

When a colored picture is printed, four layers of color are superimposed upon each other, each supplying its own appropriate tints and details. In singing, four types of voice are combined to give depth and body and completeness to the tone.

And to carry the comparison further, the Psalms, like a soft, instrumental accompaniment, supply the theme and undertone, and reveal much that would otherwise be hidden.

So, each contributing its own part, we are given a complete picture of the perfect life—the life of Jesus. Not that the outward circumstances of his life were perfect, that would mean nothing.

But, regardless of the circumstances, in spite of the bitterest experiences, his *reaction* to them all was perfect, and his inner peace, the peace of a complete faith and a righteous conscience, like an impregnable fortress, though constantly assailed, was never broken into.

They Feared to Ask Him

"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it" (Lk. 9:23-24).

Luke Chapter Nine

There are some Scriptures which require time for us to adjust ourselves to them. They embody the essence of a multitude of minor precepts and require a multitude of minor adjustments. We must return to them again and again to check our course and our progress by them.

Such are these words of Christ. It requires time even to find out all that they mean—in fact, it seems that this process of fathoming their full implications is endless—and it takes further time to adjust ourselves to these implications as they unfold. No one could ever feel within himself that he had completely exhausted their meaning and satisfied their requirements.

* * *

"The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected and slain" (Lk. 9:22).

"Let these sayings sink down into your ears: for the Son of Man shall be delivered into the hands of men. But they understood not . . . and they feared to ask him" (vs. 44-45).

Why were they afraid to ask further light? Because these things that Jesus was saying were disturbing and did not fit in with their conception of what lay before them. They did not want to face the implications of his words. Their minds were full of his coming glory, and their respective ranks of honor around his throne—see the next verse, where they contended among themselves who should be greatest.

It would have been better for them to have faced their fears, and asked him what he meant. They would have been better prepared for the ordeal to come, and braced against the hopeless despair that engulfed them at his crucifixion.

"Fools and slow of heart to believe all the prophets have written!" (Lk. 24:25).

How natural to close our eyes to unpleasant truths, but how comforting on the other hand to be fortified in a time of trouble by a clear perception beforehand that all is in harmony with a glorious divine plan!

As they continue on their journey they come to the village where the Samaritans refuse to receive them, and the disciples say—

“Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?”
(Lk. 9:54).

Our minds go back a little way—

“And they said, Lord, teach us to pray. And he said, Pray ye on this wise: Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us” (Lk. 11:1-4).

How quickly this beautiful lesson of love was forgotten!

“Even as Elias did.” How glibly we justify our natural desires by some eagerly-grasped Scripture that suits our end!—*“Abraham was rich” . . . “Daniel had great authority” . . . “Solomon lived in splendor” . . . “Moses led an army.”* The whole life and teaching of Jesus was of the spirit of lowly gentleness and kindness, but it is this fiery instance in the life of Elijah that immediately comes to their mind—*because it fitted in with their feelings.*

They little realized the exalted nobility of the purpose that centered in Christ. There was no room there for petty personal resentment. He saw men broadly as sheep without a shepherd, seeking rest and finding none. *Even in their blind abuse of him, he pitied them,* for they but vented on him the bitterness of their own frustration and futility.

This instance illustrates how difficult it is to seek scriptural guidance with an open mind, and how easy it is to find just what we are looking for. What assurance then have we ever that we are not self-deceived? Narrow is the way, he said, and few there be that find it. *Few there be that even FIND it!* But still the unchanging promise is—

“Ye shall find Me—when ye SEEK for Me with ALL your heart” (Jer. 29:13).

Millions are seeking with varying degrees of earnestness and effort, *but few put their whole heart and soul into it, to the exclusion of all else.*

This is the only guarantee of success. This is the only possible *hope* of success. One sole and all-exclusive purpose—

“If thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light” (Matt. 6:22).

“A double minded man is unstable in all his ways”
(Jam. 1:8).

Divided interests and affections lead only to endless mental turmoil. Lukewarmness is an abomination to both God and

man. God gives us a positive guarantee of failure before we start if we do not throw ourselves into His service with wholehearted zeal. Those who attempt to serve two masters lose any real enjoyment and satisfaction that they might have derived from either service.

* * *

In the last few verses of the chapter, Jesus speaks to three men. Here again, the words of Jesus are of the type to which we must keep returning, seeking to adjust our outlook and our lives. They are not what we would naturally expect Jesus to say in the circumstances. They must be slowly digested. They are lessons in a type of thought and viewpoint directly opposite to the natural.

Natural man's thoughts are based on maudlin sentimentality that has no solid framework of reason and which a slight irritation soon exposes as superficial. Natural man is all for goodwill and fellowship—until his little personal interests are jeopardized or his touchy sensibilities are affronted. To the natural man the words of Jesus were often very hard—

"This is an hard saying—who can receive it?" (Jn. 6:60).

He was always seeking to drive them deeper—force them to think down through the common shallow veneer—shake them out of the rut of paralyzing habit and unthinking conformity with an unthinking brute existence. Consider what he says to these three men, especially the second. The man asked—

"Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father" (Lk. 9:59).

Jesus replied to him—

"Let the dead bury their dead" (v. 60).

What a thing to say at such a time! A hard saying, indeed. Of course, human commentators explain it away. They say that the man meant, "Let me stay with my aged father until he dies." Instead of letting it "sink down into their ears" and seeking to extract divine wisdom from it, they attempt to water it down and thus escape its searching, transforming power—

"Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the Kingdom of God."

Would he stop to bury his father if a flood or tornado were sweeping down on him? Would he stop to care for the *dead* if his *living friends* were in dire and immediate need of his help? It is all a question of relative values.

He took his call too lightly. Men had been living and dying for thousands of years and were to do so for thousands more.

Many had been buried and many had not, it was all the same in the end. *But here was the turning point in God's plan of the Ages, that would triumphantly sweep death from the earth.*

In the fulness of time God had sent forth His Son, and *this very moment* he was saying personally to him, “*I need you NOW, follow me!*” The words still rang in the air. And the man said, “I can't make it right away, I have something else to do first.” And so his great moment passed.

He did not realize—and how *hard* it is to realize—the utter insignificance of natural things. He was not ready when the call came. He hesitated. He had other things on his mind. Suddenly confronted with a decision, he failed.

How important to be ready beforehand—to have laid the right foundation during the time of opportunity!

The lesson and the type is clear. “*See that that day come not upon you unawares*” (Lk. 21:34). Be ready. Keep your lamps trimmed and full of oil. Get mentally adjusted to the relative values of natural and spiritual things, so that when He once more shakes not the earth only, but heaven also, and many things that seemed well-grounded begin to rock and sway, and a decision is suddenly thrust upon us, we shall have the discernment to distinguish what to hold fast to, and what to let go.

Thou Fool

O, YE OF LITTLE FAITH!

Luke Chapter Twelve

Luke 12 is very useful in helping us to determine whether we are with the few on the very narrow path of life, or if we are with the vast hordes on the way of death. It contains some of the most searching and enlightening teachings and commands of Christ. It is perhaps best summed up in two words of verse 20—*"Thou fool!"*

In return for renouncing this life and giving ourselves wholly to God, we are promised endless joys far beyond our capacity to conceive; and yet we continue, like mindless infants, to play with tiddly-winks. It is absurd, and it is pitiful.

This chapter is an attempt to shake us *out* of this stupidity, *into* wisdom and reality.

"He began to say unto his disciples, First of all beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy" (verse 1).

Hypocrisy: pretending, make-believe, false appearance. There keep coming back to mind those two tragic cases of folly with which the Mosaic and Christian dispensations begin—

In the midst of a great work for God, greedy and small-minded Achan thought he could steal and hide and use for himself that which was God's.

And Ananias and Sapphira, in a time of glorious unity of fellowship and unselfishness, *"kept back part of the price."*

"Thou fool!" Sapphira to think that you can outwit God—to think that you can ignore the rules and still receive the prize. "Thou FOOL!"

* * *

"For there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed: neither hid, that shall not be known" (v. 2).

We must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ, and we shall leave that place either in shame, or in glory and joy.

Every act of our lives today must be measured against that one great moment of truth. The issues are so vast that *any act today* that does not contribute to success at that time is obviously utter stupidity—*"Thou fool!"*

* * *

"Be not afraid of them that kill the body . . . but fear Him who can cast into Gehenna" (vs. 4, 5).

Much of natural life is based upon fear of, and dependence upon, natural man. The idea is broader than just fear as such, but encompasses dependence, reliance, trust. The point is: depend wholly and exclusively on GOD, Who alone has power to preserve and to destroy.

* * *

Arising directly from this is one of the most remarkable and thought provoking statements of all Scripture (v. 6)—

“Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings?—and not one of them is forgotten before God.”

What a momentous revelation of the character and infinity of God! Of all the millions and millions of sparrows that so briefly come and go in the great cycle of life, not one—not one—is forgotten before God!

Our puny minds think in measures and limits. God is measureless and limitless. If God had limits, He wouldn't be God.

We worry faithlessly about our health, and our livelihood, and our puny little rubbishy possessions; yet God is watching every sparrow! Peter says—

“Cast all your care upon Him” (1 Pet. 5:7).

Note the “CAST” and note the “ALL.”

Cast it—throw it—get rid of it—forget it—get it out of your mind. Don't just lay it there gingerly, still holding on with one hand, waiting apprehensively to see if it will be taken care of. Throw it there and turn your back on it.

And ALL of it. A part won't work. To hold back part of our cares is just like holding back part of the price. It is lack of faith. If we want God to handle our affairs, we must turn ALL our problems over to Him, and concern ourselves *solely* with getting on with HIS work.

* * *

“Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of Man also confess before the angels of God” (v. 8).

This is directly related to the previous consideration—fear of man or of God. And confessing Christ publicly is not just verbal testimony, not just one aspect of life—it is a complete way of life.

Everything we do or say must be a confession before men of our allegiance to Christ and his way of holiness and wisdom. We must publicly and obviously radiate that fact, even to the point of appearing—in the eyes of the wicked world—as foolish, fanatical and extreme. There are many ways we can deny Christ. Any neglect or violation of his commands is denying him

before men—treading him under foot—taking sides against him. His commands are many, and contrary to all fleshly “common sense,” and we stand absolutely no chance at all of keeping them if we do not constantly study and meditate upon them—

“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” (1 Cor. 2:14).

* * *

“Unto him that blasphemeth against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven” (v. 10).

Is it possible to come under this irrevocable, unforgivable condemnation today?

That is not a profitable question. It is like saying, “If I jump off this cliff, shall I be able to climb back up?”

Why even consider such childish stupidity? The profitable course to take is to ask, what is the principle here? What is the warning? What is the lesson for our guidance? What are the dangers to be avoided?

The big lesson appears to be this—

Whenever we complain about anything, whenever we are unhappy or dissatisfied with anything, we are going in a dangerous direction; we are playing with fire and disaster.

We are told that all our affairs are under the loving dispensation of the Spirit of God—that “*all things work together for good,*” and are for a wise purpose in our training and development as children of God, and that it is our duty to patiently learn the wisdom these things teach.

Whenever, therefore, we do not accept all events and circumstances in cheerful faith and thanksgiving, we are setting our face in the direction of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit of God, and that path leads only to irrevocable death.

* * *

“When they bring you before powers, take no thought what ye shall say; for the Holy Spirit shall teach you in that same hour” (vs. 11, 12).

Peter says (1 Pet. 3:15): “*Be ready*”—(that implies previous preparation)—

“Be prepared, be ready to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you.”

And Paul said to Timothy—

“Give attendance to reading; meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them” (1 Tim. 4:13, 15).

These commands all go together, and explain each other.

God's assurance of guidance depends wholly upon our giving ourself ENTIRELY to His Word and work.

He has put it all in His inspired Book of Life. He will help us find it and understand it and remember it—IF we will “*give ourselves wholly to it.*” “*Wholly*” is the key. We must put it first in our lives at all times: “*Seek ye first . . .*”

We may have, with great and self-satisfying effort, worked the things of God all the way up to second place in our lives, and we may thereby feel a great sense of accomplishment.

But second is no good at all. It might just as well be a hundred and second. It must be first, or nothing.

* * *

“Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me” (v. 13).

Here was a man in deep trouble who came to Christ for help.

Christ spoke of justice and fairness one with another. Here was a man cheated out of his inheritance by a wicked brother, and he appealed for Christ's help that justice might be done. All he asked was fairness.

Why then did Christ rebuff him so sharply and strongly? Why not at least condemn the selfish brother and speak out for justice?

The answer is very revealing, and out of it comes that parable whose heart and lesson is summed up in those two words—*“Thou fool!”*

“Thou fool! A man's life consisted not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth” (v. 15).

Possessions are baby's toys, rubbish, dung, a burden, thick clay. How hard a lesson to learn, until it is too late to do us any good in living our life sensibly!—

“Master, my brother has taken my marbles and my rattle! Make him give them back!”

Christ came to speak and teach about REAL things, *eternal* things, *grown-up* things; things that have value and meaning and purpose and glorious, endless futurity.

Christ came to try to lift men's puny little minds out of the passing rubbish of this present brief vale of tears—

“Thou fool! This night thy soul shall be required of thee: THEN whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?” (v. 20).

What can they do for you then—except to rise up to expose and condemn your hoarding lust and greed—at a time when

you need help most, as you stand at the judgment seat to give an account of your stewardship of GOD'S GOODS that He has entrusted you with to be used exclusively in HIS service?

What a great and terrible day of reckoning there is soon to come upon the Household of God!

"So is he that layeth up treasure for himself" (v. 21).

* * *

Then he goes on to drive the lesson home to those who PROFESS to follow him and PROFESS to love his commands—

"Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat: neither for the body, what ye shall put on" (v. 22).

Truly people have to eat, and people have to dress; and it is desirable that food be enjoyable and nourishing, and dress adequate and suitable.

But these things are very secondary and minor things in the great purpose of life—not the major things the animal world makes of them. They must be taken care of as quickly and simply as possible, and then the mind and energies must be turned to the real, important, eternal things.

Christ strongly warns his people about two deceptive dangers in this connection that can lead to failure and death—

1. Interest in and wasted attention upon these things—the passing things of the present instead of concentrating all our attention upon our spiritual learning and development.

2. Concern and worry about these things instead of having complete, trusting, childlike faith in God Who feeds the ravens and so gloriously clothes the lilies—

"Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them" (v. 24).

Jesus is not teaching lazy improvidence, under the guise of faith. Paul says, speaking equally by the inspiration of the same Spirit—

"If a man will not work, neither shall he eat" (2 Thess. 3:10).

"He that provideth not for his own household is worse than an infidel" (1 Tim. 5:8).

Work is the whole purpose of our lives. Work—useful, purposeful, productive activity—is the very essence of true life itself. *"Always abounding in the work of the Lord"* is the only way given whereby we may attain to life—

"WORK out your salvation in fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12).

The whole issue is as to WHAT work we devote our lives to, and what its purpose is.

* * *

"Which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit?" (v. 25).

The thought clearly is—not as would appear from A.V., adding two feet to our height, which surely could not be spoken of as *"the thing which is least"*—but rather extending our life by even the briefest of periods.

The word translated "stature" is translated "age" in the expression, *"He is of age"* (Jn. 9:21); and again in Hebrews 11:11: *"She was past age."*

The "cubit" was proverbially used in this connection of something very small, as meaning, "You cannot extend your life even one more step." David said (Psa. 39:5)—

"Thou hast made my days as an handbreadth."

Truly we can do things which shorten our lives, and we can do things which lengthen our lives, and it is our duty to use wisdom in this respect, but always subordinate to the issue of usefulness to God, which always takes priority.

Paul could, for example, have doubtless lengthened his life by avoiding the labors and abuses and hardships and beatings and sleeplessnesses that he endured, but he considered the work of God more important than mere physical wellbeing.

But in the obvious sense in which Jesus speaks here we cannot add one second to our life when the time comes for God to take our breath, so why be concerned with lesser things?

"If God so clothe the grass, how much more will He clothe you, O ye of little faith!" (v. 28).

That is us—the best of us—ALL of us—

"O ye of little faith!"

Faith is the great thing to be developed in us all—a life whose every action and decision testifies that all our trust and dependence rests on the direct daily care of God, and not on ourselves.

There is only one way that saving, God-pleasing faith can be developed and maintained—

"FAITH COMETH BY HEARING, AND HEARING BY THE WORD OF GOD" (Rom. 10:17).

This blunt statement of Jesus—*"O ye of little faith!"*—with those other two words, forms the essence of this chapter—

"Thou fool! . . . O ye of little faith!"

“For all these things—food and raiment—protection—security—comfort—do the nations of the world seek after; and your Father KNOWETH that ye have need of these things” (v. 30).

“But rather seek ye the Kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you” (v. 31).

* * *

Verse 33: *“Sell that ye have, and give alms.”*

Let us pause and consider this very striking command—

“Sell that ye have, and give alms.”

This is not one of those passages where we read in the margin “Some ancient authorities word this a little differently.” No one doubts or questions that this is the original text.

This is not one of those passages where we must look up how the words are used elsewhere, to try to figure out what is meant. They are all plain, simple, common words, none over four letters.

This is not one of those passages where we have to go to lexicons and commentaries to try to find an explanation. The simplest among us can clearly understand this command, IF WE WANT TO.

Some day, and it looks like it will be soon, we shall be asked, publicly in front of everyone, just what we understand that command to mean, and to what extent we allowed it to motivate and transform our lives from natural animal, to spiritual—

“Sell that ye have, and give alms: provide yourselves a treasure in the heavens” (v. 33).

It just might be a good idea to start planning NOW as to what answer we shall make, for upon the convincingness of our explanation in that day will depend whether we hear, “*Thou fool!*” or “*Come ye blessed of my Father.*”

“We must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ to GIVE AN ACCOUNT of what we have done.”

* * *

“For where your treasure is there will your heart be also” (v. 34).

It is good that he added that. And the more we consider it, the more true we realize it to be. Truly the command itself is sufficient, to test our faith and our obedience, but the explanation adds greatly to the incentive.

Wherever our treasure is, there our heart and attention is bound to be. If it is on earth, it will inevitably pull our minds down to earth, and rob us of eternal life.

If we are careful and diligent to transfer our treasure to the Bank of Heaven in the way Christ prescribes, as soon as it comes to our hand, then we shall find our heart and our attention strongly drawn upward as by a great and irresistible magnet.

* * *

"Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning"
(v. 35).

Figurative language, but with a clear and obvious meaning. "Loins girded" means awake, alert, and prepared for immediate action. "Lights burning" means the lamps of knowledge not only filled with the Spirit oil, but in the active state of radiance and illumination, both for our own path, and to attract and guide others.

* * *

"And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord" (v. 36).

We are told, here and in other places, that the moment of Christ's coming will be sudden and unexpected; and some will be ready, and others not.

We are told that much depends on just how that moment catches us—prepared or unprepared—watching, or off guard.

Not because our chance state at any particular moment would be the determining factor—that would be just like a game of chance—but because our state of readiness at that time will be the key to our whole life.

Some will tire, lose interest, relax, be temporarily diverted. With some, the keen edge of ardent expectation will be dulled by luxury or prosperity or simply the force of custom or habit. With some it won't happen to be Sunday morning when the call comes, and therefore their minds will be far away on other things.

But those who truly love will become more eager, more alert, more watchful with each passing day, knowing and rejoicing that each day brings them one day closer to that joyful time on which their heart is fixed. That great day will not catch THEM with their minds on other, rubbishy things.

* * *

"That when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him IMMEDIATELY."

"Immediately"—that is the vital word there. There must be no hesitation or looking back—no last minute scurrying to put neglected things in order, or to fill neglected lamps.

Jesus' point is that, to please him, there must be a constant looking forward to that moment; a constant, instant readiness to go, like a runner on his mark, alert for the starter's gun.

It is so fatally easy to get things around our neck that distract from that readiness.

The approved will be those, and ONLY those, who are so thrilled and overwhelmed with the greatness of that promised time that nothing else matters very much to them at all.

They will find it hard to get their minds on present things, even to the point of taking care of obvious necessities. They will be ready and watching because the very intensity of their love and zeal and faith will make any other condition impossible, especially in these last terrible but wonderful days of swiftly fulfilling prophecy.

But what if we just do not have and cannot arouse that burning intensity of faith?—

"Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the WORD OF GOD" (Rom. 10:17).

This prescription for giving health and robustness to feeble faith is clear, and the cure is divinely guaranteed. There will be no excuses accepted in that great day if we have neglected the prescribed treatment for our fleshly corruptions and infections.

* * *

Jesus' closing remarks in this chapter may appear somewhat obscure, but they are obviously a serious and urgent warning, and therefore meant to be understood and attended to—

"When thou goest with thine adversary to the magistrate, as thou art in the way, give diligence that thou mayest be delivered from him, lest he hale thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and the officer cast thee into prison.

"I tell thee, thou shalt not depart thence till thou hast paid the very last mite" (vs. 58-59).

Here, this follows the condemnation of the hypocritical nation of Israel that could recognize the signs of the weather but could not discern the great time that had come upon them in the visitation of God's Son.

In Matt. 5:25, the same warning occurs in another context. It there follows the instruction to be reconciled to our brother before making offering to God.

In one case the warning appears more national in its application, in the other more individual; but in each case the principle is the same. It speaks of an Adversary who has the

ultimate power to judge and punish, and it warns us to make peace with Him while opportunity remains, before the final issue is joined and it is too late.

If we fail to arrange a settlement and the case is carried to court, we are lost; for THERE we can only get justice, and what we must have to escape condemnation is mercy.

We have seen how, nationally, Israel failed to make their peace with the judicial Adversary, and how the judgment day came by the Roman armies. And how, for two thousand terrible years, they have paid in blood to the last mite.

The context in Matthew, the more individual application, introduces another aspect—

"As we judge, so shall we be judged." (Matt. 7:2).

If we judge others charitably and sympathetically, seeking to understand and to help rather than condemn, we ourselves shall be so judged.

If we judge suspiciously and condemningly, we ourselves shall be judged suspiciously and condemningly.

As we drive hard bargains in natural things, so shall we be treated in spiritual things.

As we glory in mercy and forgiveness and liberality and returning good for evil, and imputing no evil, so shall it be done to us in the day of final account when we shall need every measure of mercy and forgiveness we can get (Lk. 6:38, 39)—

"Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over.

"With the same measure that ye mete, withal it shall be measured to you again."

We each, by our treatment and judgment of others, set the pattern of our own judgment. How few, how few, have the wisdom to put aside the flesh and walk in the way of life!

Every Man Purifieth Himself

"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves" (1 Jn. 1:8).

No one, it would seem, would make that bare statement. We all are only too fully aware that we are far from sinless. But there is a kindred frame of mind that is perhaps more common and more deceptive. It is a form of self-satisfaction. It says, "*We are doing as well as can be expected of us.*" In Bible words—

"We are rich, increased in goods, and have need of nothing" (Rev. 3:17).

This attitude can too easily indicate a total lack of comprehension of the whole purpose of life and condition of natural man. It isn't a case of just getting through life, like a routine job to be done. Life must be regarded rather as an *opportunity*—not merely a duty.

The span of our life is the period given us to accomplish *certain definite results*. These things, if our life is to be regarded as a success, *must be done*, and this is the only time in which they can be done.

We are born in a certain condition—with certain propensities, certain characteristics. In the aggregate these are known as the "flesh." *There is nothing good or wholesome about them.* They are unpleasing, unholy and unlovely—crude, selfish, earthy. That is our nature.

It can be pleasant, but its pleasantness is of the thin and self-centered kind that vanishes when it is annoyed. It can love, but its love is rooted in self-gratification. Broadly speaking, where its own interests and pleasures and emotions are not concerned, it is thoughtless and heartless.

The world in general would not concur in this analysis. We ourselves would hesitate to express it if solely based upon our own observation. If we permit ourselves to be influenced by common opinion of the world's general self-approbation, we shall regard *this* view as hard and extreme, but if we fully accept the authority of God's Word, we must accept His appraisal of human nature.

This then is the foundation with which we start. This is the rough material with which we must work. But we are called from it to holiness, perfection and purity. A complete transformation from the ugly, repulsive, selfish thing we first discover ourselves to be, to a lovely, glorious likeness to the character

of God. Not as a present achievement, but as the *unceasing incentive of an ultimate goal*.

And it is the apostle John whose name is most closely linked with the powerful agent that is to accomplish this transformation. That agent, of which John speaks so fully, is *love*. The greatest danger, it would seem, in regard to this subject, is misunderstanding, or not fully comprehending, what is scripturally meant by love.

It is not an emotion. It is a far bigger, better thing than that. It is a *principle of life*. It is the adoption, as the determining influence of every action, of the revealed divine viewpoint. God is love. Love is God. No definition of love is true which limits this conception. Love is godliness of character and action. Love is the enlightened expression of the mind of God. It is divinity. *It is the antithesis of everything human, carnal and earthy.*

Love is an expanding, uplifting influence, wholly pleasing and wholly satisfying, based on broad and eternal principles, with all the smallness and pettiness of human nature put away.

How does love transform us? We know that every thought leaves within us a permanent effect for good or evil.

As individuals, we are merely the sum totals of all our thoughts. We cannot separate ourselves *from* them, because *we are them*—

"As he thinketh in his heart, SO IS HE" (Prov. 23: 7).

Every thought leaves its actual, physical effect upon our constitution. Thoughts are the small units of construction of which our characters consist. Every good thought is beneficial and works toward the final desired result, every distracting thought is a useless impediment, every evil thought is a ruthless breaking down of what faith is laboring to build. Therefore we are told—

"Bring into captivity EVERY THOUGHT" (2 Cor. 10:5).

Our thoughts, and consequently our speech and actions, are influenced by many things—our nature, people, and circumstances, among others. Slowly we are molded by these influences, and upon them our character depends. Of *all* the influences, which bear upon us and form our character, there is only *one* which can benefit and improve us to any extent and *that* is the influence of *God*.

We cannot create goodness or holiness within ourselves. We *become* what we are *made*. But we *can*, to a determining extent, choose the influences which are to make us. That is our responsibility. We cannot be *free*. In the nature of things, we

must serve some master. If we choose sin or the world, we become its servants, its slaves, and it gradually shapes us to its hideous pattern of death.

But this is where love can play its saving part, and if submitted to, can mold us to the beauty of everlasting life. Love cannot be separated from God. Love is divinity and godliness—wisdom, holiness, purity, kindness and patience combined.

Above all, *patience*. Paul *begins* his analysis of love by saying, “*Love suffereth long and is kind*” (1 Cor. 13:4). Patience holds the keys. As long as patience holds open the door, all other virtues may and will develop. As soon as impatience closes it, all hope of peace or advancement is destroyed. John says—

“*Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as HE is pure*” (1 Jn. 3:3).

And he continues (v. 7)—

“*Little children, let no man deceive you—he that DOETH righteousness is righteous.*”

What is John driving at? Is he not trying to impress us with the fact that our effort must show some *tangible* results?—that good intentions are not enough. There must be *visible improvement*—a steady growth of godly attributes and weakening of earthly ones.

“*Unto him that overcometh*” are promised many things but nothing for him that *meant* to overcome. We *must* overcome—we *must* advance. What was acceptable yesterday is not good enough today. Yesterday’s goal must be today’s starting point. “*Therefore,*” says Paul (Heb. 6:1)—

“*Leaving the first principles . . . let us GO ON to perfection.*”

It is a long way to perfection for the natural man. We have far to go and much to do. We must increase the talents entrusted to us. There was nothing but bitter condemnation for the servant who buried his lord’s money in the earth. True, he kept it safely—but that is *NOT ENOUGH*. He didn’t *increase* it. The warning is clear. There must be *tangible RESULTS*.

There is no excuse. We know the formula. We have only to make the effort to apply it. It is inevitable that we shall be molded and shaped by the influences with which we come in contact. It is a universal law. It is up to us to choose the influences wisely.

WE CANNOT REMAIN UNCHANGED. Every experience and action has its effect, whether of death unto death or life unto life.

If we subject ourselves to the influence and thinking of the world, we shall bring forth fruit unto the world. It is a natural law of our constitution. If we subject ourselves to the influence of the Word of God with a consistency and intimacy that permits it to have its perfect work, we shall gradually acquire a godlike character. It cannot fail **AND IT MUST BE DONE**.

"We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory" (2 Cor. 3:18).

Pretty words indeed—**BUT**—do they really mean anything specific to us?—can we give any **EVIDENCE** of their operation **IN OURSELVES**? Can we point to spiritual fruit?—gentleness, patience, purity and truth?

This is the most important question that can ever be asked us. It *will* be asked us *soon*. The world is rapidly approaching chaos. *What have we to show at the final reckoning?*

Talk is cheap—very, very cheap. Fine phrases are sweet, and profession is easy in these tolerant, friendly days. But *the real battle is just as hard*, and just as important as ever.

"If ye THROUGH THE SPIRIT do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live" (Rom. 8:13).

AND NOT OTHERWISE. Do we even know what it *means*? We shall find out some day if we don't. Some day it will be burned into our minds to exclusion of every thought.

Thousands are already standing silently at the Bar, waiting for the number to be made complete. Many of them we have known intimately. Soon *we* shall join them. Let us ponder it well.

Having a smattering of the "*First Principles*" and being, as the phrase is, "*in the Truth*," is no stopping point or guarantee.

Can *any* be so self-deceived? Do any feel that in doing this we have done all that is necessary and can wait in assurance for the final divine approval, in the meantime busying ourselves with such transient things as attract our attention? Is it *that easy*?

We have set our hand to a lifelong work, and have *promised to put it foremost*. The baptismal examination is just to see if we *understand* the promise we are making and the responsibility that we are solemnly taking upon ourselves.

The transformation from the course of death to the course of life is a long and painful process, requiring constant fortification. We promise, at baptism, to adopt an entirely new course of life, based on revolutionary principles. We promise to put

away forever the motive of pleasing ourselves and adopt the motive of pleasing God alone. We promise to apply this to every action, knowing that the only way to become godlike, and finally immortal, is to *minutely* and *consistently* follow a God-directed course of action which gradually puts the flesh to death.

This applies to *every* action and decision, particularly the everyday ones, for it is the small, hard-to-control reactions and emotions that hold the balance of power, for good or ill. The smaller an action is, the more fundamental it is and the more it reveals character. It is much easier to key ourselves up for the *big* things than to be consistently true in the *little* ones.

This requires a continuous absorption of incentive and direction and power from the Spirit of God, through His recorded Word. This is the whole secret. Success or failure depends directly upon it.

If we put ourselves, by constant study and reflection, in permanent contact with godliness, we shall be gradually transformed by it. If we don't, then it won't happen. Everything is the result of cause and effect—

"As a man soweth, so shall he reap" (Gal. 6:7).

"Think on these things," says Paul (Phil. 4:8).

"Meditate on them—give thyself WHOLLY TO THEM"

(1 Tim. 4:15).

GIVE THYSELF WHOLLY TO THEM. That leaves room for *nothing* else. Such other activities as are necessary for the sustenance of life and the fulfilment of legitimate obligations, instead of being interruptions or violations of these principles, should be made opportunities of practicing them and putting them into actual service.

How can holiness and godliness and purity and faith be applied to office work and factory work and housework? Does it seem incongruous? If it does, there is something wrong, there is something warped and clouded about **OUR VIEW-POINT**. The command is—

"WHATSOEVER YE DO, do it heartily, AS UNTO THE LORD, and not to men, knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward" (Col. 3:23, 24).

We may get *part* of the reward now, a small meaningless part of it—enough to keep our bodies functioning—but the *real* reward is later. The less we get now, the more we have in store—**THE MORE WE GET NOW, THE LESS WE HAVE IN STORE**. Of some it is said, *"Verily, they HAVE their reward"* (Matt. 6:2).

This is a vitally important point. It lifts our daily work out of the dull mundane sphere of carnal things and brightens it with the opportunity of serving God in the Spirit while attending to necessary temporal burdens. John says (1 Jn. 2:15)—

“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world.”

This is not an arbitrary prohibition. It is the guidance of wisdom. We are not taught arithmetic at school just to rob us of the pleasure of figuring incorrectly. That would be a childish, petulant way to view helpfully-intended instruction.

So with *God’s* instruction. None of it is harsh or unnecessary. It is meant to *help* us—to put us on the right road to life and happiness and well-being in a real, permanent, substantial sense. John does not stop with the bare command; he gives the *reason*—

“All that is in the world is not of the Father,”

—*it is alien and out of harmony—*

“The world passeth away, but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever” (1 Jn. 2:16, 17).

The world passeth away and takes all its friends and participants with it. Its fellowship is the sinister fellowship of death.

Many worldly things are not in themselves *wrong*. Many worldly acquaintances are not specifically *wicked*, but they all belong to a state of things that is ready to vanish away. To take part in their interests warps and cramps and beclouds our perception. We cannot hope to ever be part of a large and eternal *heavenly* order if we think small petty *worldly* thoughts.

Every spiritual thought is an ingredient of the new creature—a strengthening of the spirit—a step towards life.

Therefore, says Paul (Phil. 4:8)—

“Whatsoever things are true, lovely, gracious and just, THINK ON THESE THINGS,”

—and thereby gradually become like them. John continues—

“Every man that hath this hope purifieth himself, even as HE is pure” (1 Jn. 3:3).

“Be ye holy,” we are commanded (1 Pet. 1:16): *“for He is holy.”* Cleanliness, holiness, purity—these are attributes of *entirety*. A man is not *clean* if he is partly dirty. *Half* pure means *impure*. Perfection is demanded. Jesus said—

“Be ye therefore PERFECT, even as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matt. 5:48).

“BE YE PERFECT.” How can we be PERFECT?

“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us” (1 Jn. 1:8).

But it is not a perfect *obedience* that is expected. Our perfection is a *gift*, not a personal accomplishment, for John goes on to explain (1 Jn. 1:9)—

"If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and CLEANSE us from ALL UN-RIGHTEOUSNESS.

"If we walk in light . . . the blood of Jesus Christ CLEANSETH US FROM ALL SIN" (1 Jn. 1:7).

This is the secret of perfection. We cannot approach Him acceptably unless we are clean and pure in His sight. The Law of Moses teaches us this.

Therefore *we must at all times maintain our purity from worldly thought and contact by the merciful cleansing of humble repentance and forgiveness.*

And so we meet together clean and pure and perfect and acceptable before him—not sinless, but repeatedly *washed from sin*. How merciful a provision—but let us never abuse it.

Should we regard sin with less fear, because God cleanses us so freely? "*God forbid!*" says the Apostle Paul (Rom. 6:2). Rather should His mercy be an incentive to greater effort.

It is a grave and solemn calling—the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Tremendous privileges—tremendous responsibilities. Of him who treats it lightly, it will at the last be said—

"Better were it for that man if he had never been born"
(Mk. 14:21).

What God Hath Cleansed

"Call for Simon, whose surname is Peter, who shall tell thee words whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved" (Acts 11:13, 14).

ACTS CHAPTER TEN

The story of Cornelius is very interesting and important. It occurred about seven years after the Crucifixion, and it was the big turning point in the history of the Ecclesia of Christ.

This first seven years had been devoted to preaching to the Jews; although at its end, just previous to this (as we read in chapter 8), the Truth had been extended to the Samaritans, who kept the Law of Moses, and to the Ethiopian eunuch, who was obviously a proselyte of the Law and almost certainly circumcised into that Law.

The baptism of Cornelius is the culmination of Peter's recorded labors. Immediately thereafter, the narrative of Acts turns permanently to Paul. We read of Peter's imprisonment and release in chapter 12, and he passes out of the direct record in Acts 12:17—

"He departed, and went into another place."

Up to this point, from the beginning of Jesus' ministry ten years before, Peter had been the unquestioned leader and spokesman and most prominent of the apostles. After the Crucifixion, it was always Peter who led and initiated everything, beginning with the replacement of Judas by Matthias.

But henceforth the whole record centers about Paul, while James appears as the leader and spokesman in Jerusalem. Peter only appears in the record incidentally in connection with the activities of Paul, as when Paul first visited Peter in Jerusalem or when he rebuked him at Antioch.

But Peter's epistles reveal a continued life of faithful labor, and a beautiful development of spiritual character as the apostle and guide to scattered Israel, as Paul was to the Gentiles.

But first it was Peter's work, as the holder of the keys of the Kingdom, to open the door: first to the Jews on the day of Pentecost, and seven years later to the Gentiles in this very detailed account of Cornelius.

* * *

We learn from verse 1 that Cornelius was a soldier, an officer, and a Roman; stationed at Cesarea, the Roman headquarters for Palestine. It is strange that two other Roman centurions

before Cornelius stand out remarkably in the Gospel record: the one at Capernaum who "*loved the Jewish nation*" and had built them a synagogue and who had greater faith in Jesus than any in Israel; and the one at the cross who said—

"Truly this was the Son of God."

—believing, like the thief on the cross, in the hour of apparent defeat, when all the nation rejected him.

Verse 2: "*A devout man . . .*"

The word for devout is EUSEBEES, meaning "well-reverenced" that is, having much reverence actively directed to good ends and activities.

". . . that feared God . . ."

—mentally devoted to serving and pleasing God.

". . . with all his house."

His whole household was in beautiful harmony with the powerful godliness of this remarkable Gentile. We learn further (v. 22) that he was "*of good report*"—highly esteemed—"among ALL the nation of the Jews": a remarkable achievement for a man who had to represent and enforce the resented domination of a hated foreign power.

Here was one of the most remarkable men of Scripture: one of the usually proud and ignorant conquering heathen race who could see—in spite of Israel's corruption and wickedness and degradation—that this people's God was the One True God of all the earth.

He had apparently seen no miracles. He saw only a corrupt, hypocritical political priesthood, and an evil nation ripe for destruction, bitterly divided over the claims of Christ, and persecuting his disciples. Yet he knew—he clearly perceived—that this was the people of God: and he loved them.

He was not a proselyte to the Law. The whole significance of his admission to the Body of Christ hinges on the fact that he was not a proselyte, for this event was the great historic opening up of the door of faith to the Gentiles purely as Gentiles, with no half-way measures.

WHY was he not a proselyte? Why had he not gone as far into the service and communion of God as was provided and possible for a believing Gentile? For here was a very intense and devoted man, and his devotion was clearly not something that had just happened, for he feared God with all his house, and he was well established in the respect of the whole nation of the Jews.

The answer seems to lie in the fact of what he saw before him. He saw a nation divided over the preaching of Christ as the Son of God and end of the Law.

Peter says (v. 37) that Cornelius knew about these things—about what Christ had done, and what was being proclaimed about him. He knew Israel's God was the true God. He sought God with all his heart. But where should he turn to approach Him more closely?—to the Law or to Christ?

* * *

Verse 2: *He "gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always."*

Here are the two essentials. Here is the secret of his great blessing as the father and forerunner of the Gentile faithful. Here is the great practical lesson of the chapter—

"Seek, and ye shall find: Give, and ye shall be given"
(Matt. 7:7).

He did not just give alms and pray to God. There are millions that do that, and they just come and go. He gave MUCH alms, and prayed ALWAYS. There is the key. This was his whole way of life—CONSTANTLY doing good to others, and ever seeking God in prayer.

Without this, he would have been nothing. Without this, no one is anything. *"Giving alms"* does not necessarily mean giving material things. So many excuse themselves from this divine obligation by the claim they have nothing to spare (which may be true, though it is usually rooted in greed and fear and selfishness and faithlessness, rather than true fact). But giving is of one's self, and time, and labor, and love, and interest, and concern.

"FREELY have ye received: FREELY give."

The day is soon coming when many professed believers will be found clutching their pitiful hoarded bag of unfaithful stewardship, and will be exposed in their naked, shivering, faithless greed for all the assembled ages to see.

* * *

Verse 3: He saw an angel. It was the ninth hour—the typical hour of prayer, and he was in the act of praying when the angel appeared, as he says in verse 30—

"Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and behold a man stood before me in bright clothing."

The revelation will ALWAYS be in the *"hour of prayer."* It can come no other way—

“Seek, and ye shall find.”

He saw an angel. Angels are very real, and very present. We are never alone. We should endeavor to be much more aware and much more conscious of this than we are. This is the difference between fear and faith, wherever we are and whatever may come.

* * *

Verse 4: *“Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.”*

Here was an unbaptized, unjustified Gentile whose prayers were accepted by God. But his prayers and his alms did not save him. He was seeking God—seeking knowledge—seeking salvation. Such God hears and guides into the Way of Salvation.

The angel said (v. 6) that Peter would tell him what he *“ought to do.”* In verse 22 we are told he was *“warned”* from God to seek the instruction from Peter. And Acts 11:14 tells us even more fully and explicitly that the angel told him Peter would instruct him how he could and should be saved.

His prayers and alms and good intentions and love for God, while highly well-pleasing, were not enough. There must still be knowledge and obedience to the one appointed Way of Salvation, into and through Christ by baptism. Even after he had received the gift of the Holy Spirit (v. 44) he STILL must be baptized into Christ to lay hold on salvation; and so Peter commanded him (v. 48).

* * *

Verse 5: *“Send to Joppa, to Peter.”*

This would be about forty miles down the Mediterranean coast, to the present Tel Aviv-Jaffa. He was not told to go himself to Peter, but to send for Peter to come to him. There were several reasons for this.

Not only Cornelius himself (which might just appear to be a special exception), but his Gentile household and kinsmen were to be instructed and received into the Faith. This godly and energetic man had not kept his faith to himself, but by the power of his zeal and example had drawn and influenced many associated with him, and had thereby providentially prepared a little community of Gentiles to receive Christ.

The more we consider this man and what is recorded of him, the more we shall be impressed by him. Though a man of authority and responsibility and dignity, he had no scruples or

hesitancy about falling down publicly at the feet of Peter in thankfulness to God and respect to God's messenger.

It was important, too, to establish the new open door more clearly, that Peter GO TO HIM—in his Gentile surroundings—outside the Law—and associate with him there.

* * *

Verse 6: *"He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the seaside."*

We are reminded of Christ's birth in a stable. A tannery was a despised and unclean place, both ceremoniously and actually. Because of the odor and defilement, tanneries were required to be outside the city limits, as in this case. It was a lowly, looked-down-upon trade. That Peter should be lodged here indicated the lowliness of the positions of the believers in Joppa.

* * *

Verse 7: *"He called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually."*

Here was another, a subordinate, who under Cornelius' guidance had devoted himself to the worship of the one true God.

Verse 8: *"And he declared all these things unto them."*

He made no secret of it, and stood on no ceremony, but told his servants all about his experience. Clearly there was no false pride of position, but a remarkable and simple openness and natural humility.

Though it would be by now getting on into the late afternoon, for he had seen the vision about three, and these men had to prepare for the journey, he still sent them right off that same day, and they arrived at Peter's lodging a little after noon the next day.

Cornelius, a devout Gentile and of good reputation in all Israel, has been specially prepared by an angel for this great historic event in the development of the Truth—the first meeting together in worship and fellowship (and undoubtedly of breaking the bread), of Jew and Gentile, without any intermediate steps of proselytism in the Law of Moses.

In the meantime, as these messengers approach (v. 9), Peter is likewise being specially and divinely prepared.

The way in which it is done is beautiful and interesting and instructive and impressive. It was not just theoretically and coldly explained to him. Rather it was graphically and unforgettably and vividly manifested, yet just a step at a time, causing

Peter to ponder and wonder just what he was being taught, and what he would be expected to do.

Peter had never eaten anything contrary to the restrictions of the Law of Moses. Like every sincere and pious Jew, this was fundamentally and almost indelibly engraved into his whole character and mentality from early childhood.

It would not only be mentally, but physically, nauseating to him to think of eating anything he had all his life looked upon as defiled and unclean. His "*Not so, Lord!*" is very emphatic: not just "No," but "*Never!*" "By no means!" He recoiled in horror from the idea.

Faithful Israelites for one thousand five hundred years had built their purity of conscience and peace of mind with God upon the careful obedience of His holy Law, which had been engraved upon their nation so solemnly, and which carried such dreadful warnings and penalties for disobedience.

And then suddenly, without any warning or preparations, he is told to cast this divine pattern of a lifetime aside. Actually, there HAD been warning and preparation, but he had not perceived it. Looking back now, once he had had this great lesson, he would see much that he had not seen before—

"Go ye into ALL the world, and preach the Gospel to EVERY creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mk. 16:15, 16).

Not "*Preach the Law,*" but Preach the GOSPEL. And not "*He that is circumcised,*" but, "*He that believeth and is BAPTIZED.*" For seven years they had labored against bitter persecution to show Israel the great Light of the glory of Christ. But now the time had come for the Gospel to break out of all its Jewish swaddling bands and restrictions, and go forth to all the world.

Paul, the great apostle to the Gentiles, had already been called, and was apparently at this very time in seclusion in Sinai, being prepared directly by Christ for his great work.

But Peter must be the one to first open the door.

Verse 15: "*What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.*"

Rather, more strongly, as in the Diaglott and R.V.—

"What GOD hath cleansed, do not YOU make common or polluted!"

There is a great lesson here for us. So often in our supposed zeal for God's law, we presume to dictate to that law according to our own emotions and established prejudices, instead of be-

ing careful to be always ready to learn. This command to Peter was not just given once, or even twice, but THREE TIMES—
“Arise, Peter, Kill and eat.”

And three times he blindly and emotionally recoiled from it, but doubtless with increasing realization each time that a great new lesson was in process, though not knowing what that lesson might be.

As Peter is pondering this vision, the men from Cornelius arrive at the door. We see how the wisdom and providence of God is gradually working out these events.

At this point, Peter gets another direct divine communication—

“Arise, get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing, for I have sent them.”

Further instruction and assurance, but still no explanation. Here too, there is much food for thought. We would like everything explained in detail. We would like to have all the answers to every possible and hypothetical question.

But God does not always choose to give us this. He gives us all we need for guidance day by day as our limited scope and duties require IF WE WILL HAVE THE WISDOM TO USE IT, and it mostly concerns our OWN personal character and conduct. This is where our principal work and responsibility lies.

We remember how the Lord wanted Paul to preach in Europe. But He did not tell him so. He just kept turning him back when he attempted to go in other directions (Acts 16:6-8). We must be wide awake and alert for these guiding signs that turn us back repeatedly until we find the right path.

Then, at last, when Paul reached Troas, on the coast of Asia, there came the vision of the man of Macedonia, calling for help. Still no direct instruction, but a sufficiently clear guidance for those alertly seeking and praying for guidance, for, says Luke in Acts 16:10—

“Immediately we endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us to preach the Gospel to them.”

The word translated “*assuredly gathering*” is interesting. It literally means “putting together.” They put together all the items of guidance and reached a conclusion in which they had confident assurance.

And so Peter here sets out with these men the next morning, still not knowing just what he is to do or how things will work out, but trusting that he will be guided when the time comes.

He took with him six other brethren. It was clear from the visions and messages that he and Cornelius had received that there was to be an important development in the history of the Truth, and it was important for the sake of the Body that there be several competent witnesses.

Cornelius had gathered together his kinsmen and his friends. Clearly Cornelius was not just an isolated believer, but the nucleus and doubtless the creator of a harmonious community of godly-minded individuals. This present event was truly entirely of God, but still it was based upon Cornelius' earlier faithful labors in example and teaching. Here is how God works with men, and how men must labor to prepare themselves to be worked with by God.

Peter said to the assembly (v. 28)—

"Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation."

Truly the Law of Moses did very strongly teach holiness and separation and a very clear distinction between clean and unclean, living and dead, the people of God and the people of the world—just as the law of Christ teaches today.

But much of the ritual and regulation and restriction of the Jews was a matter of tradition and not of God, and we must be careful of the same surface and artificial tendencies today.

The separation must be of heart and purpose and manner of life. By tradition, the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans, but kindness to the stranger was a very prominent feature of God's Law to them through Moses, and in the parable of the Good Samaritan Jesus taught that in matters of help and kindness and human need, everyone in the world is our neighbor, and merits our concern and care.

We cannot be associated with the world's activities and interests and enterprises and amusements, but we **MUST** mingle freely with all with a view to helping, both materially and spiritually—especially the latter.

Such is the deceptiveness of our own hearts and flesh that we often find that it is those who make much of separation and "holiness" as regards to others, themselves spend their time in the world's silly and childish games and amusements, instead of devoting their energies to the Truth, and will join worldly associations for present material advantage. Let a man examine HIMSELF—and from the pervasive and subtle danger of hypocrisy, none of us are free.

Hearing Cornelius relate his experience, Peter said (v. 34)—
*"Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons,
but in every nation he that feareth Him and worketh
righteousness is accepted with Him."*

This was nothing new. God does not change. This was truth from the beginning. The Jews were not selected as something exclusive, but as God's medium of manifestation and door of hope to the world. And even in their wickedness and blindness they served this divine purpose, for consider the many devout Gentiles that Paul found in all the synagogues of the Roman world that he visited, and which became the chief fruits of his labors. And here too, it was the Jewish nation that had revealed God to Cornelius and led him to worship and obedience.

Then Peter, still not knowing just what course he was to follow in relation to bringing these Gentiles into the Body of Christ, preached unto them (vs. 36-43) the substance of the Gospel and the Truth concerning Jesus as the promised Messiah and Deliverer and appointed Judge of the quick and the dead.

The Truth concerning Jesus would be the principal point Cornelius would need, for he was already a fervent believer in Israel's God and Israel's promises.

Then at last, at just the proper time, when Peter had done his part as directed, and gone as far as he could without further guidance, God once again directly steps in (v. 44)—

*"While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Spirit fell
on all them that heard the Word."*

This, together with his own previous vision and admonition about calling unclean what God had cleansed, was conclusive evidence to Peter and to the brethren with him of these Gentiles' readiness and acceptability for baptism (v. 47)—

*"Can any man forbid water that these should not be
baptized, which have received the Holy Spirit as well
as we?"*

Recounting it later, he says of this moment (11:16)—

*"Then remembered I the words of the Lord, how that he
said, John indeed baptized with water, but ye shall be
baptized with the Holy Spirit"*

He had gone ahead with the work in faith and obedience, and at the proper time God guided him to the decision and left no doubts in his mind. So He will with us, IF we do our part faithfully, and walk according to what light we have.

Verse 48: *"Then prayed they him to tarry certain days."*

And unquestionably he did, and this would be the first united assembly of Jew and Gentile in the Body of Christ, and undoubtedly they would break bread together in joy and fellowship before he left them at the end of those "certain days."

We hear no more at all of Cornelius, and very little of Peter, but a great and permanent foundation stone had been established, and in the wisdom of God and for the ultimate peace and welfare of the Body, it was best that Peter, the leading apostle from the beginning, be the one to establish it.

This was the culmination of Peter's work in the center of the apostolic stage. Till now he had been the leader and key figure from the beginning, but now it was time for Paul's work to begin, and build a holy edifice for the glory of God, upon this foundation of an open door for the Gentiles.

Peter had much more work to do, and a final testimony for Christ in the laying down of his life, but his public record of activity fittingly closes with this event.

It was not the end of controversy on the matter. There is never an end to controversy, but the foundation is there for those with wisdom to find it. Even Peter himself wavered on this same point on a later occasion, out of a well-intentioned but misguided desire to pacify agitators, and Paul had to correct him.

Truly we must do all we can to avoid offense, and everything possible must be given up for the sake of peace if necessary, but the foundation cannot be yielded.

The very last words we have from Peter, at the end of his second epistle in which he spoke of his own soon-expected death, was high praise for his "beloved brother Paul," and commendation of Paul's epistles as "Scripture" given by the wisdom of God (2 Pet. 3:15, 16). Then he concludes his final message, 2 Peter 3:17, 18—

"Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness.

"But grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever. Amen."

Through Much Tribulation

"But the Jews raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas . . . and the disciples were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit" (Acts 13:50-52).

ACTS CHAPTER 15

How often it is that adversity dulls the cravings for worldly things and sharpens the pleasures of divine joy! We are many times told how the disciples found this unearthly joy in the midst of trouble and distress.

Those things which naturally seem to be blessings—ease, luxury, comfort, prosperity, and men speaking well of us—usually prove the greatest dangers and pitfalls and yield a large harvest of sorrow; while those things that are shunned and despised by men—toil, distress, persecution, necessity, and the opposition of the world—are rich, fruitful soil for the seeds of divine joy and peace.

Why is it so? Why is prosperity degenerating to us? Why are times of luxury always times of laxity? Why does it take tribulation, as Paul says, to work patience and godliness (Rom. 5:3)? Why must we "*through much tribulation*" enter the Kingdom of God" as we read in verse 22 of the 14th chapter of Acts?

The answer lies in our very constitution. That which *gratifies* the flesh *stifles* the spirit. The more the flesh, with its lusts and ambitions and pleasures, is catered to, the more *sickly* the spirit becomes. In proportion as the eye of lust is satiated, the eye of faith is dimmed. The *more* we have, the harder it is to regard it as *nothing*, which we must do.

Therefore Christ said on one occasion, as he sorrowfully watched the rich young ruler depart—

"How hardly shall a man that hath riches enter the kingdom!" (Mk. 10:23).

Christ was not angry or bitter—rather he *loved* the young man (we are told) and was *sorry*, intensely sorry, for him. Only *one* thing he lacked! He had faith; he had an earnest desire to follow Christ; he tried to be righteous in all he did (Mk. 10:20); he had enthusiasm and zeal. All this is clearly shown by the narrative.

A poor man with the same qualities would have had no difficulty in deciding. We are distinctly told that it was his *possessions* that stood in his way and were the basis of his only shortcoming. Therefore Christ was sorry for him.

The young man was no worse than many others. Doubtless he was far more earnest and honest than most, but his trial was great and he yielded to it. The flesh offered so much, so easily, and without delay—the present was so bright that the future was dimmed and obscured.

Therefore, says Paul, we must through much tribulation enter the Kingdom. It takes tribulation to wrench us out of spiritual indolence—to give us clear perceptions of the flesh and spirit—to turn our minds and hopes and aspirations to a higher, firmer level—to teach us the vanity and insecurity of present satisfactions. So we read, as the chapter closes—

“But the Jews stirred up the chief men of the city, and raised PERSECUTION against them . . . and the disciples were FILLED WITH JOY and the Holy Spirit” (Acts 13:50-52).

* * *

Acts 14:1—*“and it came to pass in Iconium that they went BOTH together into the synagogue . . .”*

Why is “both together” inserted here? Clearly our attention is deliberately drawn to the fact, and our thoughts are directed to the tremendous value of *companionship*; and conversely, the tremendously added burden of standing alone.

The Master, we recall, sent out his disciples *two* and *two* (Lk. 10:1; Mk. 6:7) and this is the usual course in Scripture.

Of course, many of God’s servants have labored alone, as necessity has required. “*I, even I only, am left*” said the prophet Elijah (1 Kgs. 19:10), “*and they seek my life to take it away*”—and the prospect appalled him. Not solely the imminent danger, for that was not new, but the feeling of utter isolation and desertedness.

Paul was often reduced to this condition, or close to it—

“All they which are in Asia be turned away from me . . .

Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world. Only Luke is with me” (2 Tim. 1:15; 4:10-11).

Today all Christendom would be glad of the distinction of Paul’s recognition, but during the period of his labors, many so-called “brethren” were ashamed or disdainful of his poverty, his unpretentious speech and demeanor, and his humiliating chains.

Doubtless they said he was a fool to be so outspoken when a little worldly wisdom and discretion would have so often eased his situation. *But a few there were who perceived the true*

values, and for these Paul fervently thanked God. Without such, even he might have found the effort too great to sustain.

Jesus, too, during his supreme trial, was entirely alone—and not merely alone but forsaken by those he should have been able to count upon, but it was the will of God and he found God all-sufficient for his needs.

We can see, however, the value of the disciples to him during his ministry. True they were at times weak, often disappointing and sometimes quarrelsome. True too, there was no comparison between his and their mental level and perception. These things must have often tried his patience sorely, but their earnest, intense, though dimly-perceiving devotion and companionship filled a void that might otherwise have been insufferable.

With the wise, the learned, the great men of his day, he had nothing in common. No fellow-feeling—no bond of communion. How often one looks, and looks in vain, for spiritual strength and help from those whose mental powers, it would seem, most qualify them to give it!

But we discover that it is the lowly, simple, earnest individual that seems to perceive things most clearly and who strikes a responsive chord within us. Why is it that those most capable and best informed in *worldly* matters speak with such limited perception about the things of God? The Scriptures tell us the answer—*no one can advance very far along two divergent paths.*

“The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God”

(1 Cor. 3:19).

Paul was not superhuman. He was no mental wizard—no intellectual giant. That was not his secret. We are given no reason to suppose he was exceptional in this respect. Rather the reverse, for it is he who repeatedly emphasizes the fact that God chooses the *weak* things of the world to confound the things that are mighty (1 Cor. 1:27). His secret lay in his *singleness of purpose*—a burning and fanatical singleness of purpose.

“This ONE THING I do: forgetting that which is behind

. . . .”

—casting aside every other interest and consideration—counting all else but worthless rubbish—

“. . . I PRESS FORWARD to the mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:13-14).

Burning earnestness and enthusiasm in spiritual things, that is what we must pray for and ceaselessly pursue! It is not easy to awaken in our sluggish pleasure-loving natures. It will

not come of itself. It is contrary to our natural inclinations. It must be carefully grafted in and diligently cultivated.

It will not seize us and transform us as we go our normal course, so *very, very* busy with passing worldly things. There is no magic carpet to effortlessly transfer our interests to the things that will endure, and sweep us serenely through the gates of the Holy City. We all have the flesh to contend with every day of our lives, right up until the end.

We must be careful that our faith is not a spare time, easy-going compliance grounded on flesh with its roots in our own desires and inclinations . . . just a pleasant religious hobby. What happens in a time of trial to a shallow faith based on personal convenience and vague emotion? The parable of the seed tells us plainly enough. It is a fair-weather faith. It has no staying power. It gives no strength or comfort in time of need. The glare of the sun scorches and withers it because *IT NEVER TOOK THE TROUBLE TO DEVELOP ROOTS*.

It is all on the *surface*. We know what is represented by the *roots*. It means the knowledge, the perception, the grasp and insight and stability that is the result of constant study and application. We may deceive ourselves for a while and have no feeling of need for effort in this direction, but *there comes a time to each brother and sister when the roots are tried to the limit of their strength, with disastrous results to those which have been neglected*.

The importance of a firm foundation is illustrated very clearly in Acts 15. We sometimes ask ourselves why so much importance is attached to matters of belief and doctrine, which do not *seem* to have any bearing on conduct. The natural view is to regard discussions about points of creed and doctrine as bickering and dogmatism, at the expense of the far more important principle of the spirit of love, but that is not the apostolic *view*.

Paul views matters of belief in a very serious light, and he urges his hearers and readers to cling fast to what they have learned and contend earnestly for the faith as delivered to them. We cannot escape the fact that the Scriptures place very great stress on TRUTH—true belief, true hope, true doctrine, and we do not have to go very far to see why.

Without a concrete foundation of fact and truth we are at the mercy of every whim and fancy of the mind of man—every wild superstition that may be concocted or imagined. We would have no defense against "*being tossed to and fro, and carried*

about with every wind of doctrine" (Eph. 4:14). We would have nothing sure or certain. We would be veered and turned from day to day as our emotions and imaginations buffeted us.

We must have a clear and well-defined platform of fact and hold tenaciously to it. True, such an attitude is regarded as narrow-minded and bigoted by the wise of this world. To say that a man has no chance of salvation unless he believes just certain things may seem unreasonable to many pious and broadminded people, but a careful consideration should show that there is *no other way*. Truth is truth. Facts are facts. If we do not act in agreement with them we suffer.

A false belief, a false viewpoint, a false conception is valueless and destructive. We know we can accomplish nothing in this life unless our opinions about how to do it are in accord with the facts. Divine things are no different. If a man does not see the necessity of believing that the rising tide will drown him unless he gets out of its way, that won't help him any. If he persists in his disbelief of truth in the face of facts he will surely drown.

God has made certain revelations concerning His purpose. What He has revealed is *truth and fact*, and He has revealed it so that man may have a necessary foundation of truth to guide him. It is sheer presumption to assume that it is superfluous. God alone is the judge. "*Many false prophets have gone out into the world,*" says John (1 Jn. 4:1), and the Word of God is the only defense against them. We must have the facts as surely as a ship's pilot must have a true chart of the course he is to follow. Otherwise we have no stability, no security, no assurance. We read (Acts 15:1)—

"Certain men which came down from Judea said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved."

Here is a case in point. There are always men rising up and saying we must do this or that. To withstand them and follow a straight course, we must know the facts. Only the Truth can make us *free*—free from the shackles of self-deception and baseless imagination. The fuller our knowledge, the deeper our understanding, the keener our perception, then the freer and safer we are. *Truth* is precious above all things—not only truth in knowledge but in *life and character*—

"Thou desireth truth in the inward parts" (Psa. 51:6).

Returning to the original consideration—the blessing and comfort of true spiritual companionship, as illustrated by the

co-laborers of Paul and Barnabas—we find that there is much food for thought in the concluding verses of this 15th chapter.

Truly there is no greater joy than to take sweet counsel together with others who realize and appreciate divine values, and to work with them, but this blessing, like many others, must be subject to the best interests of the Spirit. There are times, as we have seen, where companionship must end and an individual course must be followed. There are times when higher considerations intervene.

We refer in this instance to the separation of Paul and Barnabas over the question of Mark. *For ten years these two men had labored together in God's service*, through privation and hardship, in spite of severe physical abuse and often in imminent danger of death. Here each saw his duty differently and joint action was no longer possible.

Men like Paul were no special creation exempted from the weakness of the flesh. They worked under the same limitations as we do. Revelations from God and possession of the powers of the Spirit did not smooth or soften the rough road they trod. Paul, beside the physical handicap of his "*thorn in the flesh*," often felt and expressed the need of his brethren's prayers for courage.

Truly he was a rock and a pillar, but his strength was no foregone conclusion. Rather, as he says, did he *learn strength through weakness*—discovering among his own doubts and failures and misgivings the fact that of himself he was nothing but that through Christ who strengthened him (Phil. 4:13) he could steadfastly run his course and fight a good fight of faith. Paul was but a willing and devoted, though weak, vessel through whom this work was accomplished. He said, and it reveals much—

"Brethren, pray for me that I may open my mouth boldly"
(Eph. 6:19).

According to *human* standards, he was an unsuitable vessel, as his remarks in various places indicate. His presence was not commanding—it required a spirit of understanding and forbearance on the part of his hearers, which at times he mentions thankfully.

His power was exclusively in *what* he said: the *way* he said it exercised no spell. His hearers, if moved at all, were *convinced*—not swayed with unstable sentiment and emotion.

"My preaching was not with persuasive words of MAN'S wisdom."

—no eloquence or oratory—

“... but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God” (1 Cor. 2:4-5).

“Ah, Lord God!” said Jeremiah (1:6), “Behold I cannot speak, for I am a child.”

“Who am I,” said Moses, “that I should go unto Pharaoh?” “You are nobody” is God’s answer, “That is why you have been chosen, that no man should glory in men (1 Cor. 3:21). You are but a tool”—

“It is GOD which worketh IN you both to will and to do of His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13).

Until we realize our own intrinsic valuelessness and learn to submerge ourselves, we are of little value in God’s work.

The issue upon which Paul and Barnabas divided was a matter of considered and legitimate difference of opinion. Barnabas wished to take Mark on their proposed circuit of the newly established ecclesias: Paul objected to this because Mark had failed them on a previous occasion.

As to which of them was more justified in the viewpoint he took it is impossible to determine, though our sympathies would favor Paul’s view. Paul’s outlook was the more impersonal one. *To him the paramount consideration was the success of the work.* He was completely imbued with the inner conviction that he was a vital tool in the vast and eternal operations of the Spirit and he felt he dare not allow any personal motives to jeopardize the result.

Mark *had* failed them, and doubtless it had been a serious and discouraging handicap and inconvenience at the time. Paul felt that he could not knowingly take a chance of a similar occurrence again and that, for the dangerous and arduous work in hand, he must take someone with a record of resolution and steadfastness.

There is no evidence on Paul’s part of personal feeling against Mark, and knowing Paul’s loving and sympathetic character from his writings, we can be sure he found it very difficult to take the unpleasant stand that he felt it was his duty to maintain.

Barnabas, on the other hand, was moved by other considerations. It seems clear that he viewed the matter more from the angle of Mark’s position and welfare. Mark, of course, was his sister’s son. Barnabas would know his characteristics very in-

timately. He would feel able to judge his position much better than Paul could.

He must have had strong reasons for believing that Mark could redeem himself, and strong assurances from Mark that there would be no repetition of his earlier desertion. He doubtless felt that to refuse to give him the opportunity of offsetting his former failure would leave a permanent and unjustified stigma upon him and might discourage him to the extent of affecting his future.

That Mark *did* subsequently prove faithful and illustrate with what "*hardness he could endure as a good soldier of Christ*" does not necessarily prove that Paul was wrong. Paul's principle was that the work should come *first* and that *any* doubts should be resolved in its favor.

And he probably thought too that if Mark *had* the disposition and qualities that were required for the rigors of the proposed journey, then he would be able to see the reasonableness of Paul's stand, and would not be permanently deterred by this unpleasant but necessary setback.

Perhaps, furthermore, Paul's clear-cut attitude at this time, bitter though it may have been for Mark to receive, furnished the incentive for the faithful labors with which he later retrieved himself.

At least we have positive assurance (Col. 4:10-11; 2 Tim. 4:11; 1 Cor. 9:6) that a full reconciliation between these three men was later effected on the firm basis of mutual labor and respect in the work of the Lord. And so though a conscientious difference of opinion unfortunately separated them for a time, still an honest and God-fearing pursuance of steadfast endeavor finally reunited them in firmer and deeper companionship, for Mark was of much value and comfort to Paul in the end. God did not permit the incident to erect a permanent barrier or cause permanent damage, but rather "*all things worked together for good*" and "*turned out rather unto the furtherance of the Gospel*" by two parties setting out instead of one.

In Acts 14:21 we read: "*When they had taught many,*" or as the margin gives it, "*had made many disciples . . .*" What was it that convinced these people of the truth of Paul's teaching when the great majority were hostile and unreceptive?

There was no *natural* advantage or incentive to belief in *those* days. It meant certain peril, persecution and ostracism from friend and kinsman. True, the apostles wrought miracles, but

miracles of themselves do not convince. They did not convince the many others in these places who saw them performed. They invented other explanations for them.

But even in these outposts of the empire there *were* those who were receptive to revelation and instruction. Humble, simple people with reverent, God-seeking minds and a depth of spiritual perception which through the ages has distinguished the handful of chosen vessels.

To these, Paul's teaching was not foreign and unintelligible—it *was the divine answer to a long-felt search and need*. Their minds having long pondered the evidences of invisible divinity around them (as Paul describes in the opening chapters of his epistle to the Romans), they received with eager gratitude the God-provided explanation and solution.

These were no haphazard converts captivated by novelty and emotion. The present disadvantages of conversion would call for careful consideration and firm resolve. They had long sought for God "*if haply they might feel after Him and find Him*" (Acts 17:27). Therefore while the vast majority, as always, despised and ridiculed the uncouth and unattractive preacher, a few *prepared vessels* perceived and responded to the divine power of his message.

"As many as were ordained to eternal life, believed"
(Acts 13:48).

Are we among such? Are we, in the sight of God as He scans the broad and turbulent expanse of human history, among those *very, very few who stand out* as His servants, His friends, His children? If we are, it is wholly on the basis of a vast difference between ourselves and the world—not just a difference of detail or circumstance or interest—that is not sufficient to mark us out where myriads are forgotten. It requires an *entirely different course of life*. We must directly reverse most desires, must be completely submerged in devotion to Him. The "*living sacrifice*" that He demands can mean no less than this.

Does this condition exist within and among us? Upon this, and this only, depends our union with these devout disciples of so long ago. Outward appearance—profession—long familiarity, mean nothing . . . absolutely *nothing*. God is no respecter of persons. His choice is made upon rigid and inflexible principles. The countless millions are allowed to die. The few who are chosen to life must be very, very different to justify the

choice. Many are called but very few are chosen. What a tragedy to confuse the *call* with the *choice*!

Let us, above all things, avoid this tragic error—the error of the Jews. “*WE have Abraham for OUR father,*” they said (Matt. 3:9), “*WE are the chosen of God!*” No error could be more fatal.

“Think not to say to yourselves, We have Abraham to our father, for I say unto you that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham” (Matt. 3:9).

That which they counted on so highly meant *nothing* in the sight of God. They thought to ride into the Kingdom on the strength of their position and affiliations. Can it be that *we* suffer from this same delusion to some degree, forgetting that God plays no favorites and that acceptance is strictly an *individual* affair and responsibility—that only an outstanding handful are chosen?

“*These things*” said Paul, “*were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come . . . Wherefore,*” he continues, “*let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall*” (1 Cor. 10:11, 12).

Tribulation Worketh Patience

*"I will show him how great things he must suffer
for my Name's sake" (Acts 9:16).*

In Acts 16 and 17 we are again traveling with Paul. At the close of chapter 15 he set out with Silas on the second of his three great journeys of proclaiming the Gospel to the world. It was about 50 A.D., twenty years after Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection.

He suggested to Barnabas that they revisit the ecclesias they had established in western Asia Minor on the first journey. From this arose the dispute over taking Mark, who had left them and turned back on the first journey. This disagreement between Paul and Barnabas could not be settled so, after working together for over fifteen years, they parted.

Paul and Barnabas had been close from the beginning. It was Barnabas who introduced Paul to the brethren at Jerusalem, when they were afraid of him. And it was Barnabas who got Paul to go to Antioch to help him with the work there.

Both these men had the Holy Spirit in great measure. Of Barnabas it is said he was "*full of the Holy Spirit*" (Acts 11:24). At the beginning of the first journey, the Holy Spirit specifically selected Barnabas and Paul (mentioning Barnabas first) to go forth together to preach to the Gentiles (Acts 13:2).

Yet still, they could not solve this point at issue between them, and this divinely appointed team broke into two. There is much food for profitable thought here, and much comfort for our present dark day. Why did they not appeal to God, and why did not God settle it for them by the direct guidance of the Spirit?

Doubtless they *did* fervently appeal to God, and doubtless He *did* settle it, but not necessarily in the way we might desire or expect. Of another trouble of another kind at another time, Paul said it had worked out "*to the furtherance of the Gospel*" (Phil. 1:12).

So here. Two expeditions set out instead of one. Of Barnabas we do not hear again, but this is no reflection on him, for the record is concerned with Paul and we hear very little about any other at all.

Of Mark, Paul later speaks very highly more than once. In Col. 4:10, 11, he was with Paul in his first imprisonment in Rome, and Paul says he was a "*comfort to him.*" And in 2 Timothy 4:11,

at the very end of Paul's life, again in prison in Rome, the one person he tells Timothy to bring to him is Mark, and he speaks of him as "*profitable to him for the ministry.*"

Of these two Holy Spirit-filled men, Paul and Barnabas, which was to blame? Which was wrong?

Not necessarily either. Nor is there any evidence that either behaved in an unChristlike way. The word in Acts 15:39, translated "*contention,*" is more often used in a good sense than a bad one. It denotes very strong feeling, but not necessarily wrong feeling. It is the word translated "*provoke*" in—

"Provoke unto love and good works" (Heb. 10:24).

It is the word used for "*stirred*" in Acts 17:16 where Paul's heart was compassionately and zealously stirred by the ignorance of the Athenians' pitiful, intense worship of what they knew not.

There was very strong feeling on both sides of this disagreement, each for his own unshakably determined course of action. Paul was determined he would not take Mark on this trip. Barnabas was determined he would not go without Mark. Both may have been perfectly right in their judgment. We are not specifically told their reasons, but they seem quite clear and both legitimate.

Paul would not take him because he had failed them on the first trip. Paul's reason may have just as much out of love and consideration for Mark as Barnabas' was. The hardships of this second trip were greater and more prolonged than those of the first. We have only to think of the terrible beating with iron rods the apostles suffered in Philippi, and the mob uproars and vicious treatments at Thessalonica, Berea and Corinth. He would know young Mark was not ready, and another failure could be disastrous for both Mark and the expedition.

Barnabas, on the other hand, would not go without his nephew Mark. He, too, was probably right. Clearly Mark wanted to go. Clearly therefore he regretted having abandoned them on the first journey. Clearly he was anxious to redeem himself. To deny him the opportunity might have destroyed him by remorse and disappointment.

So two expeditions would clearly be the answer, dividing the proposed field of visiting the ecclesias they had established, one by Barnabas and Mark to more familiar and less hazardous territory, until Mark was more fully matured as a soldier of Christ.

There are many lessons for us, but what surely is the great one? That even very outstanding apostles filled with the Holy Spirit may sincerely and irreconcilably disagree. God does not always choose to give all the answers to everything, for He is testing us to see how we react to problems and difficulties.

If we always react with gentleness and kindness and fairness and meekness and patience and brotherliness and love, all will at last be well for us, and God will in His good time clear all the clouds away.

But if the flesh comes to the surface, and we react with harshness and bitterness and rudeness and unkindness, and believe and spread false reports about our brethren, then woe betide us, for our just condemnation will be terrible indeed!

We shall never know all the answers to all problems. But if we do not consistently manifest the meek and loving spirit of Christ in all our dealings with our brethren, and scrupulous truth and fairness in what we say about them, then we might as well forget everything and join the world, for we are the world's biggest hypocrites.

We cannot possibly be right if our spirit is wrong, for God will only guide those of the right spirit. If we cannot control our own tongue and temper, then that—and that alone—is our number one life-and-death problem and we had better worry about ourselves and forget about condemning others.

So Paul starts out on Journey Two with Silas, a new companion. This time they went by land across the mountains into eastern Asia Minor, to Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, etc.

The first incident, beginning chapter 16, is the addition of Timothy to the party. It is clear that a devoted young man, to take care of the many details of traveling, would be a tremendous advantage in the work, and the loss of such, in the middle of the journey, a great blow and handicap to them.

Twelve years later, Timothy is still especially noted for his youth, so at this time he must have been very young indeed, most probably in his teens.

The first thing Paul does is to have him circumcised, though he taught, to these very same ecclesias, in Galatians 5:2, that—
"If ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing."

There are always those who are eagerly looking for "inconsistencies" to condemn in their brethren, and here indeed is a perfect example—

"Paul! You said, 'If ye be circumcised Christ shall profit you nothing.' But here when faced with a problem yourself, you dir-

ectly violate that principle, just as an expediency to save yourself trouble with the Jews!"

We know there was no inconsistency. We know Paul's motives in both cases were perfectly correct, and completely harmonious with each other. We see the picture clearly. But how can you convince someone who is seeking for something to find fault with, and to use to discredit someone? The scriptural command is, over and over—

"JUDGE NOT, THAT YE BE NOT JUDGED" (Matt. 7:1).

With our puny little limited minds, it is impossible for us to judge fairly, even if we should have all the facts. And we never have *all* the facts.

This is not to say that there must not be a strong fellowship stand, strongly adhered to. Otherwise we would all be still in the Catholic Church. We must decide where the fellowship line is, and we must faithfully adhere to it, very gently and kindly, but very firmly.

But we must never judge motives, or seek occasions of faultfinding, or believe and peddle hurtful rumors, or talk behind peoples' backs, or speak of sins—either real or supposed—**TO ANYONE EXCEPT THE PERSON INVOLVED**. In doing such, we condemn ourselves. The stern penalties of the law of Christ are very fearful against any of these fleshly abominations—

"AS YE JUDGE, SO SHALL YE BE JUDGED" (v. 2).

Many do not seem to realize the terrible judgment in store for those who accept Christ, and then violate his laws of brotherliness and kindness.

So Paul circumcised Timothy, even though he said the circumcision would cut a man off from the salvation of Christ.

The next few verses (6-10) are very interesting. We remember that these men—especially Paul—had the power of the Holy Spirit in tremendous measure, that Spirit which Jesus said should *"lead them in all truth."* In these verses, we are reminded of Abraham, who, Paul says (Heb. 11:8)—

"Went out, not knowing whither he went."

God just said to him, "Leave home; start out; I'll tell you later where you are going." We tend to get impatient. We tend to worry about what is coming, and what to do about it. But—

"Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" (Matt. 6:34).

God doesn't have to tell us what to do until the time comes to do it. All we have to be concerned about are the problems of today. That is the big lesson we find so hard to learn. We worry

about so many things that haven't happened, and never will happen. When shall we ever learn that God knows what He is doing, and we can very safely leave all the worrying to Him?

But getting back to Acts 16:6. These men were filled with the power of the Spirit, and they were out doing the Spirit's work. But what do we find? They must stumble on their way by trial and error.

They made the circuit of the ecclesias, confirming the disciples. Then they considered where to go next. Did the Spirit guide them? Not at all, except negatively. They apparently first considered going to Asia. This refers to the western end of Asia Minor, centered around Ephesus. This would be the logical move on the basis of Paul's pattern of moving gradually west by way of great cities.

But the Spirit just forbid them to go to Asia. So they headed north for Bithynia, but again the Spirit said no. They had tried west and north, and been barred, so they tried northwest, in between, and this time they were permitted to proceed.

Why did God act like this? And why are we told about it? Surely to teach us essential lessons. We have got to have patience, and we have got to have faith, and we have got to have complete, calm, unworried dependence. Answers will come, when they are needed.

So they finally by trial and error, reached the coast at Troas, at the northwest tip of Asia Minor, opposite Europe. And still the destination God had in mind for them has not been revealed. But after they reached Troas, Paul had the vision of the man of Macedonia, calling for help. Even then there was no direct instruction. How easy for God to have said at the very beginning—

"Don't waste your time trying this direction and that direction. Go straight to Macedonia."

But God, in His Own good wisdom, did not choose to do it that way. They still, by putting everything together, had to reach the conclusion that this appeared to be what God wanted them to do. And this time they were right.

Surely this whole impressive train of events is to emphasize our day-to-day dependence on the guidance of God. As soon as He tells us too far ahead, as soon as we begin to confidently plan for the future, as soon as problems seem to be clearing up and answers seem to be coming, we begin to lose touch—to lose the urgent sense of the need of daily guidance. Right away we relax.

Our minds—released from pressure—turn to worldly things. We begin to build sepulchers on high, as if this were our eternal resting place.

The next deeply instructive event is the beating and jailing of Paul and Silas. Up to the time he wrote Second Corinthians (which was about two thirds through his life in the Truth), Paul had been beaten three times with iron rods by the Romans, and five times lashed with forty stripes by the Jews. The beating with iron rods was a terrible punishment, not only at the time but in its long painful crippling effects afterward. Often it broke bones and did great permanent injury. Why did Paul have to suffer these things?

Why did Christ have to suffer as he did? Why is it—as Paul told the Lycaonian brethren after his own stoning at Lystra—that (Acts 14:22)—

"We must through MUCH tribulation enter the Kingdom of God."

Of Christ himself it is said (and it is one of the deepest statements of Scripture), that (Heb. 5:8)—

"He LEARNED OBEDIENCE by the things that he suffered."

How could a perfect, sinless man "*learn obedience*"? From the very beginning he was sinless: but he was untried, unexperienced, undeveloped in character. He had not "*Overcome*." At the end he was tried, and experienced, and established—having perfectly overcome all trials and sufferings.

Suffering is the crucible in which character is purged and purified and beautified, and then fired to indestructible permanence. In our original, natural state, we are rotten, ugly, fleshly, animal creatures. Some of us never get to be anything else but rotten, ugly, fleshly, animal creatures all our lives, though we are given the inestimable privilege and responsibility of living, like Judas, in the presence of divine beauty. Suffering takes many forms, and only God knows what each suffers, and how much. Suffering does not *necessarily* beautify and purify. Sometimes it makes us even worse than our original natural ugliness was. It is a matter of how we are exercised by it. If we really believe God—and sadly there is much less *real* belief than there appears to be on the surface—if we really believe God, then we really believe that—

"All things work together for good to them that love God"
(Rom. 8:28).

"All things"! If we haven't got that connection, we haven't got ANYTHING. And if we have got it—how can we ever be unhappy—how can we ever be disappointed—how can we ever wish things to be different than they are?

Truly we wish them to be different in the sense that we wish them to be working in a certain direction of change and accomplishment. But they *are* doing that! We *know* they are, for—
"All things WORK TOGETHER for good—toward good—
for them that love God."

All we have to be concerned about is that we are among those that truly "love" God—in the scriptural sense of complete and unrestrained devotion and obedience. And this is indeed a tall order, a lifetime effort, a fulltime project. It consists mainly of always doing what God wants, and not doing what *we* want—of always acting in harmony with the beauty of the Spirit and not the ugliness of the flesh. That's our main concern—our own character and conduct, or we are just hypocrites.

But why should Paul need more suffering than anyone else? We would think it was terrible if we were nearly beaten to death once, but Paul experienced this at least eight times, and never knew when it was coming again.

It was not because he deserved or needed it more. There is another aspect to suffering, another marvelous and beautiful aspect. Jesus said of Paul at the very beginning—

"I will show him what great things he must suffer for my Name" (Acts 9:16).

Of Peter, Jesus spoke concerning the death whereby he should glorify God. And of himself it is recorded—

"With his stripes we are healed" (Isa. 53:5).

How does suffering serve the Name of Christ, and glorify God, and heal others? These are strange and wonderful divine things. There is much we do not know, but there is also much we can dimly perceive, and somehow feel rather than actually comprehend.

Paul speaks of striving to participate in the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, and there IS indeed a "*fellowship of suffering*" that is far deeper and closer than any fellowship of mere joy could ever be. If we are Christ-like and compassionate, and kind to one another, we shall come through all problems more closely knit together in love, for we shall have experienced the beautiful "*fellowship of sufferings*."

The reaction to suffering is the key to its value. It is the beauty of character born of bitter tribulation that makes all worth-

while. If Paul had just endured these things stoically and courageously, it would have been commendable, but it would have had no living power. Many do that, and yet they are nameless and forgotten.

But let us consider the apostles' reaction. First, their clothes were torn off and they were beaten severely with iron bars. The record specifically says that "*many stripes*" were laid upon them—that is, more than usual—especial severity. They would be in constant severe pain for many days after; any movement would be agony.

Then they were thrown—literally thrown—into prison. The jailor, being specially charged with their safety, in turn "*throws*" them into the inner prison—the dungeon, and fastens their feet in stocks. These stocks were an instrument of torture to create a position of great discomfort.

All this time they would be wounded and bleeding, with their wounds completely unattended to. But the main thing is, what was their reaction to all this? All down through earth's dark history of man's wickedness this has happened (and still happens) countless times to countless millions. Natural man is a vile, jungle creature of hatred and vindictiveness and backbiting and vicious falsehood.

"And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God" (Acts 16:25).

They were not putting on an act. This was the true, deep, spontaneous reaction of their hearts. These men were really *in* the Truth. They really knew what it was all about. Their minds were thoroughly and inseparably in tune with God. They knew that all was of God, and all was for some great eternal good, and that they were a privileged part of that great purpose of at last filling the earth with God's glory.

Let us not be sorry for them. Let us rather be sorry for ourselves that in this day of ease and comfort and luxury and self-indulgence, we are so pitifully out of touch with those glorious realities the apostles' experienced. How many of us are really *in* the Truth, as they were?

They did not seek martyrdom. They fled from it whenever they faithfully could. They did all they faithfully could to avoid it. But when it came, they knew it was of God for some strange and glorious purpose, and they rejoiced in tribulation, they "*rejoiced that they were considered worthy to suffer*" for the great Name of Jesus.

One result was the conversion of the jailor—the one who just previously had cruelly added to their misery by roughly throwing them into the dungeon and putting their feet in stocks.

Was it worth it? Would we consider it worth it, if we could save a soul from death? Here is the key to the whole matter. Here we can test our hearts to see if we really are in the Truth and have any idea what it is all about. To them it WAS worth it, worth all the suffering, because they were driven by the mighty power of love for their fellowman. They were not self-centered. They thought nothing of themselves.

To what extent are we driven by that power? Is it a vital overwhelming force within us so that we are constantly seeking to do good, and willing to suffer anything for it? Are we really IN the Truth—God's glorious TRANSFORMING Truth—or do we just have a religion? "*Let a man examine himself,*" says Paul, as he turns our hearts and minds to this great sacrifice for mankind, this supreme manifestation of love—"*Greater love hath no man than this*"—

"Let a man examine HIMSELF."

To examine ourselves is an ugly, stomach-turning task. Few indeed are willing to face what they see, but those few are God's eternal jewels.

Unto Us A Child Is Born

"And they all brought us on our way, with wives and children, till we were out of the city: and we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed" (Acts 21:5).

The Bible has much to say about children. Men and women are told to consider children, and to learn from them in many ways. They are also told to observe in children many things that must be avoided, put away, grown out of, overcome. Unfortunately, our natural tendency is to cling to the faults of childhood and to quickly grow out of its virtues.

Children are the great type of our relationship to God, and God's to us—

"As a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him" (Psa. 103:13).

The main purpose of our life is to grow up, to develop, to learn, improve, mature. We must be constantly growing up—

"Unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13).

In this respect we are always children—always growing and learning. When we cease to grow and learn, our lives cease to have any meaning or purpose. We become just another comfortable vegetable.

* * *

From the beginning, The Child—the Seed of the Woman—was the heart of the promise of redemption and reconciliation—

"Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulders" (Isa. 9:6).

The birth of a child was always an occasion of great joy.

The children born to Israel received the token of the Covenant on the eighth day after birth. Here is emphasized the importance of the child in the national pattern, and their special position before God.

So we find the children of believers today stand in a special relationship to God, and therefore come under a special responsibility, for where much is given, much is expected. God blesses children for the parents' sake. What greater blessing than to be enlightened in the Truth, and to be invited to become sons and daughters of God?

* * *

We are taught, both by instruction and example, that children should be early and constantly brought into contact with

the things of God, so that their minds will naturally develop in harmony with this atmosphere.

At the end of his long parting address to Israel, comprising the book of Deuteronomy, Moses instructs them that every seven years there must be a national assembly for the reading of the Law. He says (Deut. 31:12-13)—

"Gather the people together, men, and women, and children . . . that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the Lord your God, and observe to do all the words of this law.

"And that their children, which have not known anything, may hear, and learn to fear the Lord your God."

Children are not ignored in the Scriptures. Their instruction is an important factor in the continuity of the purpose.

Similarly, in Nehemiah 8, where we have an example of the fulfilment of this command to assemble to hear the Law, the presence of the children is specifically referred to (v. 2)—

"And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation, both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding."

As soon as they were old enough to get anything out of it (which is quite young, if they are properly instructed at home) they should be there.

In Acts 21:5 we have a different type of occasion, but the same principle illustrated. It is when Paul took his departure from the brethren and sisters at Tyre—

"And they all brought us on our way, with wives and children, till we were out of the city: and we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed."

These incidents are recorded for our instruction. Children should be included in all aspects of ecclesial life. We cannot hope to reap what we do not sow.

Beside attendance at the assemblies of God's people, children are to be taught constantly at home. Israel was instructed through Moses, in Deut. 6:7—

"These words . . . thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."

The application of the principle of these commands to our present time is clear. Children should be at all meetings possible, if we have any regard for their salvation.

They should always be given the good example of parents putting ecclesial activity first in their lives, attending and cheerfully supporting every ecclesial activity they possibly can.

Without a good consistent, personal example, instruction is powerless and meaningless hypocrisy which children will see through and despise. And the daily assembly around the Word for the Bible readings will be carefully nurtured by all parents who have true love and concern for their children.

If we do our part, then—and THEN ALONE—can we reasonably expect God to do His. The Spirit commands through Paul (Eph. 6:4)—

“Bring up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”

This is a solemn charge and obligation, calling for much time, and effort, and dedication. This will not just happen of itself, if just left to itself. Nor is there any use in vain regrets when it is too late. The command is clear. The scriptural examples are clear. The Word of God leaves no doubt as to the greatness of the effort and devotion called for, for the promised blessing to be fulfilled—

“Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it” (Prov. 22:6).

* * *

Children are spoken to directly in the Bible. Of the ten commandments which God personally spoke to Israel with His Own Voice upon Mt. Sinai, one was especially for children—

“Honor thy father and thy mother” (Deut. 5:16).

The apostle Paul points out, in writing to the believers at Ephesus (Eph. 6:1-3) that this is the first command that has a promise connected with it. Actually it is the only one of the ten with a promise.

It is thus especially suited to, and designed for, children. It gives a reason and an incentive for the command. It is always best to take the time and trouble to explain why, if possible. Then children can grow in comprehension and obey intelligently. Paul says—

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

“Honor thy father and thy mother; which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.”

When he says—

“Obey your parents in the Lord.”

—he does not mean that parents must necessarily be in the Lord before we must obey them. He means the obedience must be in the Lord—for the Lord's sake—in harmony with His will. We must be subject to our parents because the Lord has appointed it.

In the same place he has a very important instruction for parents (Eph. 6:4)—

“Ye fathers, PROVOKE NOT YOUR CHILDREN TO WRATH.”

Discipline, to be beneficial, *must* be in the spirit of love and kindness and self-restraint. We must control ourselves *first*, before we can presume to control anyone else. A harsh, hasty, bad-tempered parent cannot expect to develop a gentle, reasonable, good-tempered child.

But the child must obey the parent—whether kind or unkind, just as the servant must obey the master whether he be fair or unfair. Why? Because this is what God has appointed, and this is well-pleasing to Him, and manifests a living faith in Him. Peter says (1 Pet. 2:18, 19)—

“Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the perverse.

“For this is acceptable if a man for conscience toward God suffer wrongfully.”

This is a deep and searching precept, and is one of the many that are designed to manifest the difference between those who are shallow and fleshly-minded, and those who are deep and spiritually-minded.

So obedience to parents is a direct obligation to God. Obedience will bring happiness and benefit, disobedience will bring only sorrow upon ourselves. It is foolish to think for a moment that we can get happiness and satisfaction in any other way than the way God tells us.

Is it not obvious foolishness to think that we can prove that God is wrong?—that we can outwit Him? There is only one way to true peace of mind and full enjoyment of life as God intends us to have it.

* * *

The Scriptures say many things about children. They teach many lessons by means of children. One of the most significant is the occasion on which Jesus said (Matt. 18:3, 4)—

“Verily I say unto you . . .”

—this expression is used to emphasize vital and fundamental truths—

“Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted—changed—transformed—and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of heaven.

“Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the Kingdom of heaven.”

The distinction is between natural childlike humility and false grownup pride—between a recognition of complete dependence and a false assumption of self-dependence and independence.

A little child is completely dependent—leans upon and looks to the parent for everything in the fulness of faith, quite naturally and without any thought to the contrary, without any illusions or assumptions of self-sufficiency, without any thought of proud independence.

But as soon as there is any development of personal awareness, there is a beginning of pride and self-assurance. The serpent nature, the *“pride of life,”* soon becomes manifest.

Pride is the ruling passion of human nature, and it is considered a great virtue to be self-dependent. Small-minded people take great pride in not being dependent upon others. But how fleshly; and foolish this is, when examined in the light of the Spirit’s teaching!—

“No man liveth to himself” (Rom. 14:7).

“The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee”
(1 Cor. 12:21).

What hast thou that thou hast not been given? And if thou hast been given it, why dost thou glory? Even Jesus himself said—

“I can of mine own self do nothing” (Jn. 5:30).

We of ourselves can do nothing that is really worth anything. We must reverse the world’s proud folly, and become as little children—recognizing our utter dependence upon God and upon one another—our utter natural helplessness and uselessness, of ourselves. Every breath we take is the gift of God. If He should withdraw His sustaining power from proud man for a moment, man would perish like a crushed worm.

It is hard to unlearn the habits of a lifetime—to shake ourselves free of the ugly mold into which the whole fleshly world endeavors ceaselessly to shape us like itself.

There is so much pride in our position, in our ability, in our accomplishments, in our possessions, in our appearance—so much time and effort lavished on decking and draping these poor, corrupt, perishing forms of clay.

How pitifully empty all these things are in the light of eternal truth! Most of the world's interest and activity and effort is wrapped up in empty-headed glorification of the flesh and human appearance and accomplishments, but—

“Unless ye become as little children—humble yourselves as little children—ye cannot—ye CANNOT—enter the Kingdom of God.”

We have to go to VERY little children for the example, because the trend of pride starts early.

* * *

Beside obedience to parents, we find other divine instructions especially addressed to children. Solomon says (Ecc. 12:1)—

“Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth.”

This is the only true wisdom, and yet how far the world is from it! God, if He exists for them at all, is some vague, far-off conception.

But God must be an ever-present reality with us. There must be a continual consciousness of God in all our thoughts. An effort to be in harmony with God in all our thoughts. To develop this, it helps to keep reading the Psalms of David, which reflect the mind of Christ.

God is the very source and center and purpose of life. We do not begin to live at all, in any true sense, or to know the meaning of life, until we have established God as its center. Until we have established God in our lives we are merely animals, living just by the natural motions and feelings of the flesh, like dogs. Most people in the world never rise above this natural, animal condition. They never really live at all.

But God in His love calls us to rise up to a much higher and more beautiful life—a life with depth and meaning and purpose and future.

“Remember NOW thy Creator in the days of thy youth.”

—remember—constantly keep in mind.

This is the best and most helpful advice anyone could possibly receive.

* * *

Beside obedience to parents and always remembering God, children are instructed to learn wisdom and understanding. As babies we are born knowing nothing—our mind a complete blank. We must gradually develop an understanding and a character. Solomon says again (Prov. 4:1-13)—

"Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding.

"Get wisdom, get understanding: forget it not; neither decline from the words of my mouth.

"Forsake her not, and she shall preserve thee; Love her, and she shall keep thee.

"Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go: Keep her, for she is thy life . . ."

Wisdom is to learn about the world around us—not just the world of itself, but where it came from, why it is like it is, what its purpose is, what the end is to which God is bringing it, and above all, how we may shape our lives so as to fit into that great purpose of God.

We see people being born, and we see them dying. We see ourselves in the midst of the same process. Is that all there is to it?

For most people, that IS all there is to it. They run their sad little course, so quickly over, mostly weighed down with problems and disappointments, and then like sheep they are laid in the grave forever. They live and die mere animals. How sad it all is!

But God does not desire it to be that way. He wishes men to have life and have it more abundantly, and endlessly. He wants them to seek true wisdom and understanding, and He wants them to begin as children—as early as possible, that their lives may be full and rich as possible.

* * *

There is one very important occasion in the life of Jesus when children suddenly come into prominent notice, and are found fulfilling a necessity wherein the most prominent of their elders fell sadly short. In Matt. 21:15, 16 we read—

"And when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David, they were sore displeased, and said unto him,

"Hearest thou what these say?"

"And Jesus saith unto them, Yea, have ye never read, Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings Thou hast perfected praise?"

The children, though limited by their natural ability as to detailed depth of comprehension, were far more in harmony with the broad sweep of circumstances than the intensively learned doctors of the law.

There is a great lesson here. It is so easy to get things out of balance, and become so immersed in self-glorifying technicalities and intricacies that we miss the great and living realities. Doctrine truly is essential, but the Truth of God and the Way of Life is so infinitely *more* than mere doctrinal definitions. It is the power of godliness and the spirit of holiness, the perfection of love and the perfection of beauty.

This incident directs our attention to another instruction especially addressed to children. They are called upon to PRAISE GOD. David says (Psa. 148:1, 12, 13)—

"Praise the Lord . . .

"Both young men and maidens, old men and children . . .

"Let them praise the Name of the Lord, for His Name alone is excellent, His glory is above the earth and heaven."

What is praise? What does it mean to praise the Lord?

Praising is not just a form of words or an outward exercise. It is no praise for God just to have words of praise coming out of a tape recorder or a record player.

Praise is a LIVING CONDITION—a joyful and thankful state of the mind and heart.

We may remember God, we may keep Him in mind as the central reality of life, we may acquire knowledge and understanding of Him, but if all this does not lead us to be filled with praise and rejoicing in God, it is no good to us. It is mechanical. It is lifeless.

We must be filled constantly with the joyful spirit of praise. It must be the air we breathe, the influence we radiate. God is a Person, a Father, a Center—not only of wisdom and power and righteousness and truth—but of love and goodness and kindness and joy.

The people of God—the TRUE people of God—are a glorious, joyful family, rejoicing in love for one another and for the Father of love Who has called them all unto Him.

Most people are too wrapped up in themselves to praise God. Their own little circle of activity is all their cramped little minds can reach out to.

They never learn how to live in the largeness and fulness of life. Their potentialities for spiritual growth and expansion lie dormant and useless, like the wings of a caged bird. They are the miserable prisoners of their own self-centeredness. This can happen to any of us.

But the spirit of praise opens the doors of the cage, and lifts us up to the vast heavenly expanse, and all the petty problems of the present shrink below us into insignificance.

Praise to God is the mind's great healer and purifier. It is no meaningless coincidence that the last seven Psalms are all dedicated to this glorious theme, and that the final words are—

*"Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord! PRAISE
YE THE LORD!"*

Slave of Christ

"Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the Gospel of God (which He had promised afore by His prophets in the Holy Scriptures) concerning His Son Jesus Christ" (Rom. 1:1-3).

"Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ."

Even the name that he chose, gives us a sympathetic insight into his character, for this was an adopted name. We first find him as Saul, a Benjamite, proudly named after his royal compatriot, who had stood head and shoulders above the people.

But after he had become the servant of Jesus Christ, the name Saul would no longer seem appropriate. It rang too much of regal splendor and Jewish pride, and to his now enlightened mind it would speak too vividly of the same imperious and headstrong, but misguided, temperament that he had shared with his ancient royal namesake.

So when he began his mission to the Gentiles, he chose a new name. Perhaps it was a name Christ gave him, after the example of Peter and James and John.

And, in keeping with the course that lay before him, it was a Gentile name, while "Saul," like his whole previous life had been so distinctly and exclusively Hebrew.

The meaning of this new name is interesting and significant. To us and to the world, his life has invested it with dignity and honor, and none would hesitate to bear it now, but when he chose it, it had no such atmosphere. It meant "small" or "little," in sharp contrast to the high-sounding pretensions of the name Saul. The king Saul started out commendably as Paul, the little; and ended dismally as Saul, for Samuel said to him—

"When thou wast LITTLE in thine own sight, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel?" (1 Sam. 15:17).

But Paul on the other hand began as Saul, the learned and respected Pharisee; and became Paul, the little and despised. From the same root we derive our word "paucity" meaning "insufficiency," and also perhaps "paltry" meaning worthless and contemptible.

This is the humble significance the name would carry as it fell upon the Gentile ear. It had the same meaning in both Latin and Greek. It was the calling card with which he introduced him-

self—Paul, the insignificant. He said, frankly and sincerely (1 Cor. 15:9)—

"I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle."

And again (Eph. 3:8)—

"I, who am less than the least of all saints."

* * *

"A servant of Jesus Christ."

Doulos—"a bondservant, a slave." There are seven words translated "servant" in the New Testament. This is the one Paul always uses of the believer's relation of God and Christ. It means one who is completely subject to the will, and wholly at the disposal, of another; one who is bound to serve, one who has been purchased or acquired as a possession.

James, Peter and Jude all open their epistles with the same description of themselves—the "slave of Jesus Christ." It is the word Paul uses in such passages as Ephesians 6:6—

"The servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart."

It is a repeated reminder that we are not our own, we have no freedom of action, we are bound to a proscribed and narrow course that is irksome to the flesh, but joyous to the spirit—

"Ye are bought with a price; be ye not servants of men" (1 Cor. 7:23).

"Ye cannot serve God and Mammon" (Matt. 6:24).

"Choose ye this day whom ye will serve" (Josh. 24:15).

We are bondservants whose reasonable and expected service is a living and lifelong sacrifice, as Paul says later in this same epistle (Rom. 12:1).

* * *

But there is always another aspect to remember. This only expresses one angle of our position—our duty and obligation to complete devotion and service. Paul also says—

"He that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman" (1 Cor. 7:22).

Our slavery to Christ is the only true freedom, and this is how we must regard it—not as bondage but as release.

Release from the galling restraint of the humiliating slavery to sin: an abject subservience to fleshly corruption the whole world lies under.

The natural man is ignorant of this slavery, but the enlightened man perceives it and realizes that the only release is by becoming bound to a new and stronger and better master

whose rigorous but beneficial regulations, if faithfully followed with an eye to the future, will rebuild the body and purge out the old disease of sin and death.

There are no neutrals, for the whole universe is divided into two camps, two allegiances, two slaveries: to righteousness or to sin—

“Know ye not that to whom ye yield yourselves slaves (douloi) to obey, his slaves ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?” (Rom. 6:16-18).

* * *

But further, there is yet another aspect. “Servant” does not completely describe our relationship to God, as Paul is careful to explain. It is far more vital and glorious than that.

Having voluntarily, and with true humility, assumed the obligations of bondservice in recognition of our position and of the mercy of God in receiving us at all, we find that mercy further freely extended in raising us far above the position of servants to that of beloved sons. This is the lesson of the parables of the lost sheep and the prodigal son (Lk. 15:19)—

“I am no longer worthy to be called thy son. Make me as one of thy hired servants.”

But the father said—

“This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost and is found” (v. 24).

“The Son of Man is come to save that which was lost” (Matt. 18:11).

—the lost sons of God.

“All we like sheep have gone astray, and the Lord hath laid upon him the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:6).

He was made the Son of man that we might again become the sons of God. Through Moses, the Servant “*faithful in all His house,*” came the Law which gave men the opportunity to become accepted servants—

“The Law was our schoolmaster.”

—Paul says to the Galatians (3:24), and he adds (4:1-7)—

“The heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; but is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father.

“Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world.

“But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the Law to redeem them that were under the Law, that we might

receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.

"Wherefore thou are no more a servant, but a son: and if a son then an heir of God through Christ."

Paul's words to Philemon regarding Onesimus well express our present position of favor through and in Christ (11-16)—

"Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved."

". . . in time past unprofitable, but now profitable . . ."

"Perhaps he therefore departed for a season that thou shouldest receive him forever."

A miniature allegory of the history of man.

So the word "servant" comes far short of expressing the complete picture, but it is a constant reminder that it is only by grace and favor that we are anything more—Paul warns (Rom. 11:20)—

"Be not highminded but fear."

We are sons only by mercy, and upon condition of humility and faithfulness. Jesus himself was first a servant. He humbled himself that God might exalt him in due time—

"He made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant" (Phil. 2:7).

And so he taught his disciples (Lk. 22:26-27)—

"He that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger: and he that is chief as he that doth serve. I am among you as he that serveth."

And when he washed their feet he said (Jn. 13:12-16)—

"Know ye what I have done unto you? I have given you an example that ye should do as I have done to you. The servant is not greater than his Lord."

He was THE servant—

"Behold My servant, whom I have chosen; My beloved in whom My soul is well pleased" (Matt. 12:18 quoting Isa. 42:1).

And the remarkable passage in Isaiah 49:6-7—

"It is a light thing that thou shouldest be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel.

"I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be My salvation unto the end of the earth.

"Thus saith the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel, and his Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers.

"Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the Lord that is faithful and the Holy One of Israel, and He shall choose thee."

* * *

"Called to be an apostle; separated unto the Gospel of God" (Rom. 1:1).

Both expressions have a general, and also an individual meaning. All believers are called, and all are separated, but Paul especially so. He was called by Jesus Christ on the way to Damascus, and his separation was twofold, first to the service of God, and secondly to the specific mission of carrying the Gospel to the Gentiles.

The first and general separation he refers to in Galatians 1:15, coupling it with his call—

"God, Who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by His grace."

The mention of the second more particular separation again unites it with his call (Acts 13:2)—

"The Holy Spirit said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them."

And Paul was not just called, but *"called to be an apostle."* It would appear that having been a witness of Christ after his resurrection was an important feature of his apostleship. Acts 1:22 speaks of the necessity of the apostles being *"witnesses of his resurrection,"* and Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:1, supports his claim to apostleship upon his having *"seen Jesus Christ our Lord."*

* * *

"The Gospel of God which He had promised afore by His prophets in the Holy Scriptures" (Rom. 1:1, 2).

The promise of the Gospel consisted essentially of the promise of the Deliverer who should bring it into effect, even the restoration of Paradise. Paul notes this in his next words—

"Concerning His Son Jesus Christ" (v. 3).

That is the vital, personal important living heart of the Gospel, as distinguished from the necessary details of how the deliverance should be accomplished and of what it should consist. The nucleus was that there should come in due time a Deliverer, a Savior, a Redeemer, a Restorer, in whom the whole purpose centered, and through whom it should all be accomplished.

God at sundry times and in divers manners unfolded various parts of His purpose to His servants. But to all, right from the

beginning, He revealed the one main point—that One should come through whom all would be put right, and in whom all must have faith.

Adam and Eve were promised a Seed who would destroy the power and consequences of sin.

Abraham was promised a Seed who would bless all nations.

Job was promised a Redeemer that would bring man from the grave.

Moses spoke of the greater Prophet to come to whom all must hearken.

David was promised a Son who would bring perpetual peace and righteousness.

And Israel were repeatedly assured of a Messiah who would save them, not only from all oppression and distress, but first and most important of all—FROM THEIR OWN SINS.

How slow were they, and we too, to realize that it is salvation from our own sins and weaknesses that we require above all—the knowledge to discern, the example to follow, the strength to resist, the incentive to overcome.

This was the first promise to Adam and Eve—a savior from sin—long before there had arisen any oppressor or desolator. Before there was another human being on the earth, they required a savior—from themselves. Someone to stand up on their behalf and fight and overcome this terrible curse called sin that they had loosed upon the world.

Someone to lay a foundation of perfect obedience, perfect faith, perfect love.

Someone to show them the way, and to give them the power and example and incentive to make themselves over, to root out the ugly weeds of the flesh, and cultivate the small and tender God-planted seeds that must develop the fruits of the Spirit.

Someone to nourish their pitiful weakness and ignorance into confident strength and wisdom.

Someone who, by bitter sacrifice and suffering and self-denial, would indelibly impress them with the sacred, solemn importance of holiness and truth.

He would be *“raised up,”* he said, speaking of the manner and purpose of his death, that he might draw men up to him—

“I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me” (Jn. 12:32).

Up from the earth—up from the flesh—up from themselves to newness of life. The long and stumbling ascent from the ugly,

ignorant, groveling, mind of the flesh to the beautiful, glorious mind of the Spirit—the beauty of holiness.

Why did Christ die? To seal forever the one great lesson that **ONLY HOLINESS CAN LIVE**, and that Sin is the great destroyer. When all else is stripped away, these two things stand—**HOLINESS** and **SIN**: and every word, thought and action falls under one or the other—

“All unrighteousness is sin” (1 Jn. 5:17).

Everything outside the sanctuary of the service of God—every concession to the flesh—falls under the same sweeping condemnation—

“The WHOLE WORLD lieth in wickedness” (1 Jn. 5:19).

Every action that is not sanctified by spiritual holiness of heart and purity of purpose, is contaminated with the ugly, fleshly stigma of sin. There are no neutrals in either thought, word or deed —

“WHATSOEVER IS NOT OF FAITH IS SIN” (Rom. 14:23).

Without Excuse

“For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world His eternal power and deity (divinity) have been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse”

(Rom. 1:19-20 A.R.V.).

Thus Paul declares that all around us there is evidence of God for those who *desire* to see. There is “no excuse” for ignoring God’s existence and authority. Paul says again—

“And He made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and boundaries of their habitation, THAT THEY SHOULD SEEK GOD, IN THE HOPE THAT THEY MIGHT FEEL AFTER HIM AND FIND HIM.

“Yet He is not far from each one of us, for ‘In Him we live and move and are’” (Acts 17:26-28 A.R.V.).

And David says (Psa. 19:1, 2)—

“The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth His handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night uttereth knowledge.”

This clear foundation of His reality and powers is laid by God in the sight of all men. What men next require are concrete facts concerning God’s purpose with man and His desires concerning man—*what He wants man to KNOW and what He wants man to DO.*

* * *

RELIGION CANNOT be built on feeling—that is, permanent, worthwhile religion to grow in and live by. It must have *facts—realities—certainties.*

This is the purpose for which the Bible is given. It is a textbook of God’s arrangements and requirements, and tells how man can fit himself for and into God’s great plan for the future of the earth and mankind.

First of all, we would like to strongly emphasize the fact that the New Testament *alone* is not a sufficient revelation for salvation. This is only the last quarter of God’s message to man and *cannot be understood* without the background of the Old Testament.

There are about one thousand references to the Old Testament in the New. The New is built upon, and presupposes a knowledge of the Old. Jesus said to some—

"Ye do err, NOT KNOWING THE SCRIPTURES" (Matt. 22:29).

He was referring to the Old Testament which was the only "Scriptures" then in existence. Again he said—

"O fools, and slow of heart to believe ALL that the prophets have spoken" (Lk. 24:25).

And again (Jn. 5:47)—

"If ye believe not Moses' writings, how shall ye believe my words?"

* * *

ANOTHER elementary point is that *the Bible is a big study*. We shall never get much satisfaction from it unless we are prepared to devote considerable time and effort to it.

If we *do*, we shall find that it slowly becomes more and more interesting and satisfying and will gradually transfer our interest from the passing things of the present to the great eternal realities of the past and future.

This is its purpose, and the whole purpose of our life. This present life is for probation and study and preparation for a future life of incomparably greater value and importance. God asks us to invest this present brief life in a glorious, endless future.

We must learn what we are, and what our needs are, and what has been done for us by the love of God. The love of God is manifested in the wonderful provision He has made in relation to the earth. As Paul says—

"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).

The earth, even in its present condition, is a glorious habitation. It contains in abundance everything needed for the temporal happiness and wellbeing of man. All these things manifest God's love for man and His desire that man should reciprocate that love and draw near to Him.

But the earth, sadly enough, is not the place of happiness and plenty and love and peace that it could and should be. That, too, doubtless, has impressed all serious thinkers strongly in these recent troubled years.

It is *intended* to be, and it *will* be, for the testimony is—

"As truly as I live, ALL THE EARTH SHALL BE FILLED WITH THE GLORY OF THE LORD" (Num. 14:21).

"And the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance forever.

"And My people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting places" (Isa. 32:17, 18).

But at present man's energies are dissipated in hate and cruelty and selfishness and desire for power and dominion over his fellowman.

What is wrong? Clearly there is something wrong with man. We know within ourselves there is something wrong with man. If we are thoughtful, we shall have noticed within ourselves natural impulses which, on a larger scale, we can perceive are the cause of all man's trouble and sorrow.

PRIDE, envy, selfishness, greed, inconsiderateness, impatience, irritability—all these, to some degree, we perceive naturally working within ourselves. We are injured, and immediately anger wells up, and we desire to retaliate and destroy. These things, developed to their logical conclusion, are the causes of murder and war.

Now these things we find within ourselves. We do not put them there. We *discover* them there, rooted in our natures. Often we sincerely regret the reactions they lead us to. We show by this that we recognize their undesirability.

We realize that kindness and patience and unselfishness would make a much happier world. But we find that these things *do not come naturally*. They are contrary to our natural impulses. So our own experience corresponds exactly with what Paul says—

"I find then a law that, when I would do GOOD, EVIL is present with me" (Rom. 7:21).

* * *

WHAT IS the point in all this? The point is to show that *man in his natural state is NOT good*; he does not by nature act in the way that is best either for himself or for mankind in general. And if he is reflective his own intelligence and observation will tell him this. But it cannot tell him *why* he is like this, or *what the solution is*.

Here is where the Bible comes in. It is a message from God to man telling him all he needs to know about himself. It reveals man's history, tells why he is like he is, and the provision God has made in regard to him.

God did not create man evil. But for the development of character it was necessary that man be acquainted with both evil and good and *that he learn to overcome the one and develop within himself the other.*

Paul puts it very beautifully (Rom. 8:18-22)—

"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God.

"For the creation was subjected to vanity, not of its own will, but by reason of Him who subjected it in hope, because the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God.

"For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth together until now."

If we do not see the whole picture, the travailing of creation in pain and sorrow is a puzzling and disturbing thing. But when we realize that *God is working out a purpose* and that He subjected it to these conditions in *hope*, we begin to perceive its necessity and wisdom. Paul says (Rom. 5:3-6)—

"We rejoice in our sufferings: knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given us.

"While we were yet helpless, Christ died for the ungodly."

And again (Heb. 12:7-11)—

"It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons . . . He disciplines us for our good, THAT WE MAY SHARE HIS HOLINESS. For the moment, all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant: later it yields the PEACEFUL FRUIT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS to those who have been trained by it."

This is the principle and purpose that lies behind the overall picture of things as we see them. God is training His sons in holiness, and creation as we see it is laid out in reference to this purpose.

Holiness and character and love cannot be created by a mere act of power. Therein lies their value in the sight of God. They must be *developed by freewill desire* toward God on the part of creatures endowed with independent volition.

God has subjected the creation to travail for a glorious purpose that cannot be otherwise accomplished.

* * *

WHAT is the practical bearing of all this? We are trying to lead up to what course man must follow in order to please God and promote his own happiness.

THERE IS NO TRUE, PERMANENT HAPPINESS OR SATISFACTION OUTSIDE OF PEACE AND COMMUNION WITH GOD.

Until man is at peace with God he cannot experience the happiness that God has planned for him. And this depends upon a knowledge of what God has done and revealed, and a conformity to it.

Incomparably the most important and outstanding act of God on behalf of man was the giving of His Own Son to suffer and die for man's sake. What was the purpose of this and what did it accomplish?

First of all, it provided a basis upon which God could extend His love and mercy toward man without compromising His holiness and justice.

It is primarily a *manifestation of love*—the highest and greatest manifestation of love possible. It is an advance on the part of God, seeking to stir up man's love and devotion.

Secondly, it is to provide an example and incentive for man to follow the way that is pleasing to God, demonstrating the type of life and devotion that God desires, and the benefits and divine approval and affection that result—

"This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"
(Matt. 3:17).

And Jesus said (Jn. 8:29)—

"I do always those things that please the Father."

This is the key to happiness and satisfaction: *knowing what God desires us to do, and—to the best of our ability—complying with it.*

A third purpose of the sacrifice of Christ was to demonstrate the evilness and sinfulness and destructiveness of sin. Sin is disobedience to God's loving wise and just instructions to His children for their good and His glory and pleasure.

Sin destroys all happiness and pleasure on the part of both man and God. It destroys the communion between them, and alienates man from God. It is the root of all misery. We must be strongly impressed with this fact, and resolutely determined to avoid it at all cost. We must set ourselves to learn what God desires and to follow it.

This will not be motivated by fear, but by the enlightened conviction of the extreme *repulsiveness of sin*, and by the transforming love of God and overpowering desire to be near to and allied with Him who is the epitome of all that is desirable and good.

* * *

Man, in his natural state, lies in sin. To a large extent, *ignorant sin*—he does not know that his natural way of life is displeasing to God—

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

“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 FOREVER . . . Love not the world, neither the things in the world” (1 Jn. 2:15-18).

Unaided, we do not and cannot know what is sin and what is the will of God. Uninstructed, we constantly offend and grieve Him, because our natural course is to follow the way of the flesh and the world (Rom. 8:13)—

“If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.”

This is why He has caused the Bible to be written for our instruction. It must be our daily study, if we truly desire to be pleasing to him. A few thoughts from the pen of David (writing, of course, under the influence of the Spirit) will illustrate the necessary course that love for God and desire to know Him and please Him will follow—

“Blessed are they that keep the Lord’s testimonies, and that seek Him WITH THE WHOLE HEART. Thou hast commanded us to keep Thy precepts diligently . . .

“O, that my ways were directed to keep Thy statutes! . . .

“With my whole heart I have sought Thee. O, let me not wander from Thy commandments . . . Thy word have I hid in mine heart that I might not sin against Thee.

“Open Thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law . . . I will delight myself in Thy commandments, which I have loved . . .

“The earth, Lord, is full of Thy mercy; teach me Thy statutes . . . Thou art good, and doest good.

“Thy hands have made me and fashioned me; give me understanding that I may learn Thy commandments. I

will never forget Thy precepts, for with them Thou hast quickened me.

"O how love I Thy law! It is my meditation all the day. How sweet are Thy words unto my taste! Yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

"Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage forever; for they are the rejoicing of my heart . . . GREAT PEACE HAVE THEY WHICH LOVE THY LAW."

These passages, which are all taken from Psalm 119, show the *necessary frame of mind in relation to God's revelations*—a wholehearted and fulltime devotion and absorption—and the importance of these revealed truths, not only as essential instruction in the way of life, but as the great and consuming *interest of life and substance of pleasure and meditation*. The entire Psalm is very instructive in this respect.

A daily, consistent study of the whole Bible is the ONLY way to acquire the saving and guiding and mind-transforming knowledge that brings peace.

There is a booklet, called "*The Bible Companion*," by which the Bible can be read through in one year—once through the Old Testament and twice through the New, because the latter is more detailed and concentrated.

We would strongly urge any who desire to know God to follow this plan of reading faithfully, prayerfully, and consistently.

Much of the reading will be difficult. Much will, to begin with, be incomprehensible and therefore perhaps somewhat dry. This is to be expected in relation to a matter of such transcendent importance. Nothing worthwhile comes easily, and there is nothing more worthwhile than this.

Get a Bible with good, big print and read it daily, meditating upon it, praying for the enlightenment and understanding, and *putting into practice the part you understand*. This latter is essential, for God is not to be mocked. We must approach God's Word with a sincere and humble intention *to learn and DO*. Jesus said (Jn. 7:17)—

"If any man will DO His will, he shall know the doctrine."

Read it with an open mind and without preconceived ideas, for *much of what passes for religion and doctrine has no foundation in Scripture* but is the invention of man.

On the other hand, do not jump too quickly to conclusions without comparing Scripture with Scripture. The Bible is a consistent whole when properly understood and many passages clarify other passages.

Prayer is principally a matter of thanksgiving to God and seeking His guidance as to what we should do. What we should do is plainly told us in the Bible. Praying to God for guidance or for some benefit, without doing everything we can to find out for ourselves from the source of information He has lovingly given us, would not ring true and consistent in His eyes.

There are some very plain instructions in the Bible as to what to do. If we ignore these, or do not trouble to find out about them, our prayers have no chance of recognition.

Belief of the true Gospel of salvation—the things concerning the Kingdom of God and the Name of Jesus Christ—and baptism into these things, are outstanding among the first things that must be attended to in order to stand in God's favor and receive His recognition and blessing.

You may say, "It does not seem fair to pray for help when I can do nothing myself." In a sense this is true, although actually we can never do anything of ourselves. It is God that "*works in us to do His will*," and gives us the power to overcome, that the glory may be all to God.

Our part is to put ourselves into that humble and teachable and truth-desiring and receptive condition that will enable God to work through and in us—to put aside our own desires and cast ourselves upon Him.

Our natural condition is perishing. We are, with the rest of the world, in the grip of sin, and *of ourselves it is impossible to get out of this condition*, regardless of our efforts, because our greatest efforts at best would be insufficient to entitle us to immortality. At best we are still sinners.

Our best efforts fall far short of perfection, and according to God's eternal and necessary and righteous laws, *perfection alone could ENTITLE us to endless life*. Sin and death are inseparable.

But God has, in His love, made a provision of His own freewill for us to escape from sin and its inevitable consequence, death. He has provided Jesus Christ as the Mercy seat where we can approach God and be forgiven, on the basis of our belief in God and love of Him, and our repudiation of our own sinful natures and taking upon ourselves the sin-covering Name and identity of Christ.

We die as individuals and are reborn as a part of Christ and share with him the fruits of his victory over sin.

As a token of the genuineness of our belief and love, He requires us to devote ourselves to the obedience of His all-wise

commandments, which are simply His loving instructions regarding the course to follow for our own happiness and wellbeing.

We cannot *earn* life. It is entirely a free gift on the basis of love, but we must act in consistency with the love and belief we profess. We must show, by striving to obey Him in all things, that that love is the ruling power in our lives.

This is what God desires, and this gives Him great satisfaction and pleasure—

"There is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth"

(Lk. 15:7).

—are the words of Jesus. This is a glorious and inspiring truth. This is something we *can* give God—the pleasure and joy of obedient sonship. For this, all the creation was made.

If we are sincerely striving to know and do His will and promote His glory and pleasure, we have the great satisfaction of knowing that we *are* doing something for Him. We are making our lives worthwhile and useful in the most satisfying pursuit to which it is possible to devote ourselves.

In the words of Paul, we become "*laborers together with God*" in the great plan of the ages which is to fill the earth with His glory.

Do not feel that you can do nothing for God and therefore hesitate to keep asking Him to do things for you. But there are many things we *can* give God which are of great value to Him—thanksgiving and recognition of His loving provision, praise and glory, a humble heart sincerely seeking to do His will, *a love for Him that carefully avoids those things that grieve Him*, an appreciative reverence and devotion to His holy Word which He has caused to be written for our guidance to life.

The only way to find God, and through God to find peace, is by the study of His Word. It will not come by strivings with ourselves, no matter how agonized and sincere they are. We must get the *facts*, and get ourselves in line with them—

"It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps aright"

(Jer. 10:23).

But God says—

"This is the way, walk ye in it" (Isa. 30:21).

It consists of specific facts and specific commands: "Do this—do not do that." It cannot come by wishful thinking, any more than we could learn to play the piano by merely wishing. Jesus says—

“Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and LEARN of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls” (Matt. 11:28, 29).

The closer we get to Jesus, and actually learn of him—who he is, what he has done, what he will do in the future, and what we must do in order to be allowed to draw near him and share his love and friendship—the fuller and richer and more satisfying our life becomes.

It is all real, solid facts, like learning the laws of mathematics or the facts of history, although on an incomparably higher plane. Do not grope in the dark. Use the light that has been lovingly provided for your feet.

The Bible throws a light back six thousand years, and forward into eternity. It lifts us out of the murky restrictions of the immediate present and gives us a clear view of a glorious plan unfolding through the centuries. It gives our life a purpose and meaning and connection with eternity and divinity.

With Most God Was Not Pleased

"We groan within ourselves, waiting for the redemption of the body" (Rom. 8:23).

Chapter 10 of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians is a stirring exhortation to eternal and untiring vigilance—an earnest and urgent admonition to constantly and repeatedly examine our foundations and consider our position—a solemn warning that the tide we are fighting is very powerful and if we ever pause to rest on the oars we shall be swept down the stream.

The keynote of Paul's words is *diligence*; unceasing and unwearied attention; earnest heed to the things we have received lest at any time we should let them slip. Paul is *always* driving at this principle of watchfulness, of alertness—*always* trying to impress his hearers with the danger of even a momentary relaxation of that eternal vigilance that is the high price of God's approval.

A lifelong, unrelaxing battle for righteousness, obedience and godly self-control—that is Paul's basic theme. Let us consider some of the things he says about it. At the end of the chapter previous to this one, we read (1 Cor. 9:27)—

"But I KEEP UNDER MY BODY, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to OTHERS, I myself should be a castaway."

Speaking of the constant warfare this required, he exclaimed (Rom. 7:24)—

"O, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death!"

And again he says of this struggle (Rom. 8:23)—

"Ourselves also which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the redemption of the body."

And further (Gal. 5:17)—

"The flesh lusteth against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other so that ye cannot do the things that ye would."

We are called to *war*. A war in which there is no respite. A war that demands all our energies and attention. A war to which all other considerations are subordinate. A war upon the outcome of which **ALL OUR FUTURE DEPENDS**.

No outward accomplishments or achievements, fame or position, whether *in* the Truth or *out* of it, will so decisively affect the judgment of the final day. No consideration of cir-

cumstances or position approaches in importance the unseen struggle within.

In Paul's mind, there is almost a reckless heedlessness of the external factors of our lives. He says—

"Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called" (1 Cor. 7:20).

"The time is short—let them that have wives be as though they had none—let them that weep be as though they wept not, and them that rejoice as though they rejoiced not" (vs. 29, 30).

"Art thou bound?—seek not to be loosed; art thou a servant?—care nothing for it for the fashion of this world passeth away" (vs. 21, 27, 31).

Of course, this must not be carried to foolish and hurtful extremes. There are many specific commands which bear on the shaping of the outward details of our lives, but Paul's point is:

Don't let anything confuse, delay, or displace the main issue.

The whole final outcome will rest on the result of the war within ourselves—everything else is subservient.

"To him that overcometh," we read seven times in Revelation 2 and 3, as describing the recipients of the promise. Overcometh what? Overcometh the world (Jn. 16:33). What is the world? Evil. "Overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:21). And the battle is right inside ourselves between the spirit that purifies and the flesh that defiles.

We are locked up all our lives in a small room with a deadly enemy. We can't get away from him, though many wander far in the attempt, seeking rest and finding none, blaming their disquietude on their circumstances. *We can have no peace unless we destroy this adversary* (Rom. 8:13)—

"If ye, through the Spirit, do put to death the deeds of the body, YE SHALL LIVE."

And we can have no hope of putting him to death if we permit anything to distract our attention from the task. Paul declares (2 Tim. 2:4)—

"No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life."

This is the Spirit's counsel and illustrates the urgency of the case. Paul further says—

"I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, WHICH IS YOUR REASONABLE SERVICE. And be not conformed to this world" (Rom. 12:1, 2).

And he sums up the issue in the stirring words at the end of the 13th chapter of Romans (vs. 11-13)—

“And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand.

“Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and MAKE NOT PROVISION FOR THE FLESH, to fulfill the lusts thereof.”

Truly an exalted calling—worthy of all our attention. Nay, even more, demanding all our attention. The whole teaching of Christ and the Apostles is that this is a *big* battle, a *lifelong* struggle.

Was Paul an exception when he found that ceaseless effort and constant watchfulness was necessary to a successful overcoming? Are we stronger than Paul? If Paul found that his success demanded that he cut himself off from the entanglements of this life and devote all his energies in one direction, can we possibly think that it is unnecessary in our case? Can we fight two battles successfully when he found that one taxed all his powers?

The thought is often expressed that the Sunday morning meeting affords a welcome opportunity to withdraw from all worldly distractions and apply ourselves wholly to the Word of God. There is much truth and comfort in this thought, but somehow we always feel uneasy when it is expressed. What right have we to get into “*worldly distractions*” in the first place? Did Paul? Did Christ?

The Scriptures teach that *every* thought, word and action should be motivated by the primary consideration of self-control and pleasing God. This should be the uppermost thought AT ALL TIMES. This is our whole concern. The question of our temporal preservation and welfare is a secondary consideration. That is something for which God assumes full responsibility—if we seek to please Him. He gives us no grounds for reversing this order of importance—even for part of the time. Rather He forbids it—

“Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and all these things SHALL BE ADDED UNTO YOU” (Matt. 6:33).

He gives us no grounds for voluntarily accepting any set of circumstances which, regardless of how they affect our mate-

rial well-being, make our task of self-control and godly obedience more difficult, and add to present distractions at the expense of our attention to higher things.

But, whatever our circumstances may be, whatever we are called upon to do, in every aspect and task of our daily life—the controlling thought should be, not expediency or policy or “*smart*” practice or worldly wisdom or self-assertion, but an open and honest and unconcealing avowal of the principles that please God, which are humility and gentleness and seeking not our own and a cheerful and ready suffering of injustice.

Maybe we shall suffer a little for it and be taken advantage of and not get so far in worldly things and be considered fools and “*easy marks*”—doubtless this will be the result, *but*—we shall be developing a character and self-control and record in the book of God’s approval that will stand us in good stead when all present things have passed away.

If we find, or think we find, that our position or employment requires us to suspend the application of these principles at any time, there is obviously something vitally wrong somewhere. At our daily work is where Solomon’s words apply—

“Let not thine heart envy sinners: but be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long” (Prov. 23:17).

Though we work beside them, we work on an entirely different basis. They depend upon themselves for all they get and sometimes this method seems highly successful, but—let us not envy sinners. We depend directly upon God and work to please Him—the employer is but an incidental factor completely under God’s control and we know that God is just and that we may leave our welfare entirely in His hands.

Paul’s repeated exhortation is that *nothing* must interfere with the continual application of the primary principle of our lives, and he urges a *constant*, continuous examination of ourselves in this matter. In the chapter before us he says—

“Wherefore, let him that THINKETH he STANDETH take heed lest he FALL” (1 Cor. 10:12).

The Apostle’s chain of reasoning reaches back into chapter 9, where he says (v. 24)—

“Know ye not that they that run in a race run ALL, BUT ONE RECEIVETH THE PRIZE.”

It is clear that the point he is taking from this illustration is the solemn fact that many run who will never receive the prize. Many complete the course but there is nothing waiting for them

at the end. Many are *called* but few are *chosen*. Many who understand God's Word will say in that day, "Lord, Lord!" (Matt. 7:22), but will be turned away without recognition. "So run," Paul continues, "that ye may obtain."

Just *running* is no assurance of God's favor. We must so run that we may obtain, for many run and obtain *nothing*. We must know *where* we are running and keep our mind on it. Paul says (1 Cor. 9:26)—

"I therefore so run, not as uncertainly."

And Solomon exhorts—

"Get WISDOM and forsake her not, that when thou RUNNEST, THOU SHALT NOT STUMBLE" (Prov. 4:5, 6, 12).

Paul goes on (v. 25)—

"And every man that striveth for the mastery is TEMPERATE in all things."

Young's Concordance gives "self-constraint" for "temperance." The idea is discipline in the interests of fitness.

"Now THEY do it" (he says) "to obtain a CORRUPTIBLE crown (the perishable laurel wreath), but we an INCORRUPTIBLE."

How much more, then, should we practice self-discipline, keeping under our body, bringing it into subjection and ruthlessly stifling the instinctive and unreasoning reactions of the flesh which are the root of all misunderstanding, unpleasantness, strife and trouble, lest—as Paul says—when we have preached to *others*, we *ourselves* should be castaways.

Then he continues, beginning the next chapter (1 Cor. 10:1-4)—

"Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink."

Here again is the same thought. Paul reminds them that a *nominal* affiliation with God's purpose is no assurance of His blessing or favor. He illustrates this from the position of the Israelites.

The Israelites were led by the pillar of cloud, even as we are by the pillar of revealed Truth. They were baptized into Moses as we are into Christ. They were nourished with the spiritual meat and drink of God's providing—AND YET (v. 5)—

"With many (R.V.: MOST) of them God was NOT WELL PLEASED, for they were overthrown in the wilderness."

Why? Because they presumed upon the strength of their position as the especially chosen of God, and forgot that His favor was no inherent right of theirs but depended solely upon their strict obedience to Him. What does Paul say?—

"Now all these things happened unto them FOR ENSAMPLES: AND THEY ARE WRITTEN FOR OUR ADMONITION, upon whom the ends of the ages are come" (v. 11).

Let us examine the examples he lists, where the Israelites encountered the temptations common to all men, and which are given for our guidance.

The Graves Of Lust

The first (v. 6) refers to Numbers 11:4, where we find they lusted for flesh, for the good things of Egypt and complained—

"There is nothing at all besides this manna before our eyes."

The lesson is strikingly obvious—nothing but this monotonous manna, nothing but the *bread from heaven!* Oh, for the pleasures of Egypt which we left to follow God! Forgotten was the fact that God was leading them to the promised land of freedom and plenty.

Forgotten was the fact that the pleasures of Egypt were inseparately connected *with a bondage and servitude that had no end but death.*

Do we sometimes question the value and necessity of the monotonous, flesh-wearying bread from heaven, and seek to enliven ourselves with a little jaunt into the pleasures of Egypt?

God is not mocked. What was His answer to the Israelites?—

"The Lord will give you flesh until it COME OUT AT YOUR NOSTRILS, and it be loathsome unto you" (v. 20).

A grievous plague followed and before they left that spot to continue their journey,

"And Moses called the name of that place 'The Graves of Lust,' because there they buried the people that lusted" (Num. 11:34).

The Golden Calf

The next illustration Paul cites is that of the golden calf:

"These be thy gods, Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt" (Ex. 32:4).

The Golden Calf still has an extensive following. Most people regard it as the only haven of safety and deliverance. Not so, however, the people of God who know that more often than not

it is an instrument of destruction rather than deliverance, and at best only a useful but quite dispensible tool in the hand of Providence.

Solomon compares the two schools of thought and renders a verdict that bares the fatal weakness of the Golden Calf—

“For WISDOM is a defence, and MONEY is a defence; but the excellency of knowledge is that WISDOM GIVETH LIFE to them that have it” (Ecc. 7:12).

The golden calf gave the Israelites a comforting feeling of security, but not for long. They found it was no protection against the wrath of God, and far from bringing them *life*, it brought many of them a quick death. *That in which they had trusted was the very cause of their destruction.*

The Wages of Unrighteousness

Paul continues his story. The next incident (1 Cor. 10:8) is that in which Balaam the prophet and Balak, king of Moab, figure. It is described in the 23rd and 24th chapters of Numbers. We see these two wicked men peering from a hilltop at the mighty and magnificent array of the camp of Israel—

“How goodly are thy tents, Jacob; and thy tabernacles, Israel! For from the tops of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him. How shall I curse whom God hath not cursed? or how shall I defy whom the Lord hath not defied?” (Num. 23:8, 9).

“Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel! According to this time it shall be said of Jacob and Israel, ‘What hath God wrought!’” (Num. 23:23).

What a picture of invincible security!—

“He crouched as a great lion: who shall stir him up? Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee” (Num. 24:9).

But unfortunately this is not the end of the scene. These two men do not give up so easily, and there is a lesson to be had from their tenacity if not from their unrighteousness. Truly at times (Lk. 16:8)—

“The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light”

It was so in this case.

Through the crafty counsel of Balaam, Balak found a crevice in the shining armor of Israel and so destroyed many thousands of them. He tempted them to lay aside their breastplate of righteousness. He enticed them to venture forth out of the strong tower of God’s favor and protection. And—

"There fell in one day twenty-and-three thousand" (Num. 25:9).

Peter mentions this incident, too, (2 Pet. 2:15). John adds force to the symbol in the Revelation. Speaking to the church at Pergamos, the Spirit says (Rev. 2:14)—

"Thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel."

Our Soul Loatheth This Light Bread

"Neither let us tempt Christ," continues Paul (v. 9), *"as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents."* Turning to Numbers 21:4-6, we read—

"And the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way. And the people spake against God, and against Moses,

"Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread; neither is there any water; and our soul LOATHETH THIS LIGHT BREAD!

"And the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died."

"Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted." Is not his assurance sufficient that all things work together for good? Do we have to have everything explained?

"The soul of the people was much discouraged."

Our sympathies are with them, as they must be with any who are discouraged, but we cannot deny that they had no excuse on this occasion. They would not have been discouraged if they had kept their minds on their blessings and miraculous delivery from Egypt, and not brooded on their temporary hardships.

By holding our troubles up close to our face and staring at them, we too may be discouraged; but let us try to keep everything in its true proportion and not belittle Christ's great and self-sacrificing work by warped, ungrateful self-pity.

Fear Them Not; The Lord Is With Us

"Neither murmur ye," Paul goes on (v. 10), *"as some of them also murmured and were destroyed of the destroyer."* He is referring to their despair at the report of the ten spies—

"And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron and said,

"Would to God we had died in the land of Egypt and all the congregation lifted up their voices and wept that night" (Num. 14:2).

In vain Moses pleaded (v. 9)—

"Fear them not, *THE LORD IS WITH US.*"

What was God's sentence?—"According to your faith *BE IT UNTO YOU*" (Matt. 9:29).

"As truly as I live, saith the Lord, As ye have spoken in mine ears, *SO WILL I DO UNTO YOU. Your carcasses SHALL fall in the wilderness and ye shall NOT come into the land*" (Num. 14:28, 30).

* * *

"*NOW ALL THESE THINGS,*" says Paul, "*HAPPENED UNTO THEM FOR ENSAMPLES; AND THEY ARE WRITTEN FOR OUR ADMONITION, UPON WHOM THE ENDS OF THE WORLD ARE COME. WHEREFORE LET HIM THAT THINKETH HE STANDETH TAKE HEED LEST HE FALL*" (1 Cor. 10:11, 12).

But Paul does not conclude without comfort. He does not want to leave the impression of a vengeful God, standing ready to strike at every mis-step. It is God's love he is emphasizing, not His wrath.

In the 13th verse he seeks to dispel any impression that man's road is one of arbitrary pitfalls. God doesn't buffet him for His own amusement, or even just out of concern. On the contrary, says Paul, *every incident of our lives is arranged by the untiring watchfulness of divine love*; every trial is adjusted to our capacity by the insight of omniscient wisdom; every weight is gauged in the unerring scales of all-discerning knowledge.

With divine patience, God is slowly garnishing His Temple with vessels of honor. The process is bitter, but it is glorious. Each trip to the furnace brings the gold forth purer. The higher and nobler the purpose for the vessel, the hotter the fire and the sharper the tool that shapes it and the more rigid the scrutiny it receives.

As one star differeth from another in glory (1 Cor. 15:41), so it is in the Kingdom of heaven. *The more we can stand, the more we shall suffer.* Christ suffered the most, came forth the purest, and will shine the brightest.

Godly suffering is a sign of sonship and acceptance. Absence of trial indicates unworthiness of God's fatherhood (Heb. 12:6-8). Therefore the *apostles rejoiced* that they were *counted worthy* to suffer for his name (Acts 5:41). "*But God is faithful,*" Paul concludes—

"*Who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able: but will with the temptation also make a way of escape that ye may be able to bear it*" (1 Cor. 10:13).

The Psalmist declares (34:7).

"The angel of the Lord encampeth around about them that fear Him, and delivereth them."

We believe this—but do we arrange our lives in full faith of it? Do we *depend* on it, and step forth confidently in the assurance of it; in spite of appearances, obeying God in what the world would consider a foolhardy disregard of consequences; or are we afraid to trust our weight in childlike faith to the everlasting arms that are underneath?

"*BLESSED is the man that TRUSTETH in the Lord,*" we read in the next verse of the same Psalm; and Christ echoes the same thought—

"ACCORDING TO YOUR FAITH be it unto you."

David continues (v. 19)—

"Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the Lord delivereth them out of them all."

"Wherefore," Peter adds (4:19)—

"LET THEM THAT SUFFER ACCORDING TO THE WILL OF GOD COMMIT THE KEEPING OF THEIR SOULS TO HIM IN WELL-DOING, AS UNTO A FAITHFUL CREATOR."

"THAT THE TRIAL OF YOUR FAITH, BEING MUCH MORE PRECIOUS THAN GOLD THAT PERISHETH, MIGHT BE FOUND UNTO PRAISE AND HONOR AND GLORY AT THE APPEARING OF JESUS CHRIST"
(1 Pet. 1:7).

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).

We have just read together Romans 12. We would like to consider the first eight verses. This is a chapter that is very familiar to us, but should be much more familiar than it is. Like many other chapters of the Bible, it contains the simple but profound way of life—the only way of life—the simple choice between eternal joy and eternal oblivion.

It is so easy to be in the Truth all our lives and never really know what it's all about; to continue to the end a creature of the flesh, never to face up to the simple but vital call to total devotion and total service, the only possible way of life.

Paul begins: *"I beseech you . . ."*

Let us not be misled by the gentle tone of entreaty and persuasion. The commandments of God take many forms, but they all are, none-the-less, life and death commandments. The entreaty is not to soften the command or lessen its seriousness, but to intensify it—to give it incentive, and motive, and power.

"I beseech you, therefore . . ."

The *"therefore"* points us back to what he has just said. The first eleven chapters of Romans lay out God's marvelous purpose of redeeming a few of the wise out of mankind and finally cleansing the world from the corruption of sorrow and sin. It concluded with the two thousand five hundred year tragedy of Israel, because they could not or would not perceive this simple way of life laid out before them.

The nation will at last be purified and saved, but how many millions of individuals in it have of their own free choice unnecessarily perished?

"By the mercies of God . . .", he continues.

The mercies of God are in the aggregate the great plan of redemption that His love and wisdom has devised for fallen man, manifested in the life and death of His beloved son. What a tremendous manifestation of mercy and love it is! But how few—how pitifully few—are going, in return, to do their tiny little bit that is asked to show their reciprocation of that love. And what is the comparatively insignificant response that is asked? So small in comparison that we would be ashamed to

even offer it, if it were not for confidence in the compassion and love and understanding of God.

"That ye present your bodies a living sacrifice" (that's all he asks) "holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."

To do any less—to even want to do any less—to be satisfied with doing any less, is to manifest that we are made of wood, like all the rest of the dead, wooden world around us that are not living creatures at all in any true, meaningful sense.

"Present your bodies."

That is all we have to give. Our bodies are important. Care of the body is important, a part of our divine service, like care of the valuable machine of an employer entrusted to us for his due. Abuse or neglect of the body in any way is criminal. It is the property of God, held in trust. Misuse of it is criminal, that is, for purposes other than the purpose of God.

Of course, when God's wisdom requires it, the body must be sacrificed clearly to abuse and destruction, as in the cases of Christ and of Paul and many other faithful. But any corruption or pollution or personal abuse or misuse or indulgence of the body is unfaithful stewardship and service to the flesh.

"A living sacrifice"

—the language Paul has used is from the beautiful law of Moses, and we can learn much from that law of what God requires of us. Israel never did learn the lessons and teachings of their law. They just went through the motions, and how dreadfully, tragically easy it is today to do that.

The sacrifices of the law had to be, first, the very best. They had to be without blemish. They had to be what God designated as a clean animal, of certain required characteristics. The principal one was that they must chew the cud. They *must* chew the cud. They must represent those that feed deeply upon the Word, and then ruminate and meditate continually upon it.

The sacrifices must be offered with oil, that is, with enlightenment, understandingly; and with wine—joy and gladness—not a burden; and with salt, cured with sobriety, and speech that is always sound and grave. The life's blood had to be totally poured out unto God upon and under the Christ altar.

It was all God's, for His purpose exclusively, and that vital fact had to be clearly recognized. And the fat was all God's. The fat stood for that which was precious and best—the richness. No Israelite could ever eat fat upon the pain of death. That is

self-indulgence, appropriating to our own use and pleasure that which is God's alone.

"Present your body a living sacrifice"

—a living sacrifice. The shadowy sacrifices of the law were necessarily dead. In fact the very word translated "*sacrifice*", both in the Old Testament and in the New, means literally a slaying, a putting to death. So here we are told there must be a living putting to death of the flesh, of all that is natural and animal.

Paul goes on to say that it must be holy, a holy sacrifice. Holiness is purity, and dedication, and separation—a total setting apart for a divine purpose.

In the Scriptures a very stark line is drawn between that which is holy and that which is profane. It is death to mix them. We cannot be part one and part the other. Once we have made the choice of holiness and life, the natural and the profane must be totally put away. This body is dedicated to holiness.

If any do not want holiness, do not desire to strive for the beauty of holiness, far better they depart from the body. If they want to fulfil the various corruptions of the world (putting off one husband, putting on another—all those various things) better they don't trouble and grieve the body.

He further says it must be "*acceptable to God.*" It is very possible to offer a service that is not acceptable to God, even though it be very devoted and energetic.

To be acceptable to God, it must be just what He requires, and in the manner and spirit that He requires. And it must not be marred with aspects and characteristics in our life that are out of harmony with what He requires. For this, constant study of the Word and prayer for guidance are necessary.

"Which is," Paul continues, *"which is your reasonable service."*

There have been many attempts to translate this word differently. But after all the efforts, "*reasonable*" seems to express it best—according to reason. A total, holy, living sacrifice is our reasonable service—our logical, sensible, intelligent service. In the light of two things: what God and Christ have done for us, and what God and Christ have promised to us, anything short of a holy, total, full-time service is not only unreasonable, it is blind, stupid, suicidal.

If we really want to be part of this glorious eternal divine enterprise, then all the toys and the games and the rubbish and the foolishness must go. They're all fine for babies. But we must

grow up to be useful and sensible adults. And we'll never, never grow up spiritually, if we're in the Truth a million years, unless we give our total hearts, and minds, and energies to the word and the service of God. This is what loving God with all the heart and all the mind and all the strength and all the life really means. Scriptural love is not just a mere emotion. It is a total way of life and service.

Loving God is infinitely more than just having a pleasant feeling about His goodness to us, as we go about our fleshly pursuits. Salving the conscience by occasionally expressing appropriate things like speaking of His handiwork and so on. It's far more than that.

Verse 2: "*And be not conformed to this world.*"

In what way shall we be not conformed to this world? In every way. Shall we be different, just for the sake of being different? No. We must be different for the sake of being separate, and holy, and spiritual. The world is wholly of the flesh. If we are truly God's holy people, we should be anxious not to conform to the world—to its fashion, its customs, its festivals, its general activity.

Conformity is an unthinking herd instinct. It betrays a small mind, a lack of maturity and intelligence, a lack of the ability to strike an independent course, and to act according to schooled wisdom, instead of mindless custom and copying.

"But be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind."

This word *transformed* is, in English, "*metamorphosed*". The term applies to such changes in nature as that from a grub to a butterfly. It is used in only two other places. One is that very beautiful and significant verse in 2 Corinthians 3:18—

"We all with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror, the glory of the Lord, are changed (Now are we? Are we being changed—'metamorphosed') into the same image, (that necessary image of Christ—how is it coming along?) from glory to glory, even as by the spirit of the Lord."

That is what Paul is talking about. If we are truly in this way of life, this is what is happening to us, obviously and apparently. We are steadily being changed, by study and meditation and prayer from one degree of glory to another, ever more and more like Christ.

The other instance of the use of this word is the transfiguration. Christ was transfigured (*metamorphosed*) before them. They saw him manifested in the glory of immortal divinity, even as he now is eternally.

"By the renewing of your mind . . ."

Renewing is the proper translation, but we may get the wrong impression from it. For renewing usually means restoring to an original condition. But here it means to create an entirely new condition—something in us that has never before existed. To create a new man of the spirit—new interests, new motives, a complete new character.

"That ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

This is what we have to prove or manifest to the world—the good, the acceptable, and perfect will of God. The word "prove" means to test by experience, to discern by doing. We can only learn the will of God by doing it. No one can merely learn it theoretically. It is only those who obey, that understand it.

Verse 3: *"For I say . . ."*

The "for" again, makes a connection with what he has just said. For the caution in this verse is against deluding ourselves that we are on the path of life, if we are not doing what he has just said we must do: give our bodies a living sacrifice. We must, he says here, *"think soberly."*

Now most people do not think at all—in any true sense. Thinking is about the hardest work that there is, that is, deliberate, controlled thinking along a line contrary to the natural, animal bent of the mind and interest. Only intense love and zeal can keep us at it, and then it becomes joy.

"Think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man (and we emphasize the every) the measure of faith."

What is the measure of faith that God has dealt to every man—and, of course, woman—sisters? It is clear from what he says in verses 4-8 that he is speaking of the capabilities that God gives each and the work he assigns to each one in the body—each one. How do we know what work He has assigned to us?

If we diligently prepare and develop ourselves in the word and in the mind of Christ, as Paul has outlined above, we shall find that the work will come in abundance. There will be no problem about that. There is always a vast mountain of work to be done for the Truth, for those who have eyes to see and hearts to desire—desire to serve.

Now Paul goes on to the practical application of this living sacrifice. Verses 4 and 5—

"For as we have many members in one body (think about the human body), and all members have not the

same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another."

This analogy of the human body to the body of Christ teaches us many things. *First, all are different.* The human body has a vast variety of different functions, internal and external—almost inconceivable. And *all* are needed. So we, every one, have an essential place to fill. And if any one member shirks their place that they must fill—their duty, the body is burdened and handicapped. If enough do it, it dies. It can't be healthy.

Second, all are interdependent. All usually need each other. We each need, and we each are needed. Some say they prefer isolation. They do not understand the beauty of the Truth. For a faithful member there is no such thing as isolation—it's impossible.

Our physical circumstances may separate us. But if we are not actively and totally at one with the body, in continuous communication, giving and receiving to the fullest extent of our abilities and opportunities, we are not a living sacrifice—we are not even part of the body.

Third, all have a work to do. There is no room in the body for drones or parasites. We may be, physically, so immobilized that thinking about the body and praying about the body is the limit of our capabilities. But that does not excuse us from faithfully fulfilling what we can do—our limit.

The flesh is naturally lazy, and selfish, and self-centered. Listen to Paul. It must be peaceably fought. This is the good fight of faith, and only the fighters are the victors.

The work falls into two general categories: the ministry of the word and the practical ministry of the many tasks that have to be arranged and done. Some are better at one aspect, and some at another. But they greatly overlap, and all can be useful in both. Both are absolutely vital to the health of the body.

The lazy tendency of the flesh, the diabolos that we all have, is to leave the work to others in both categories. The flesh desires to sit with its hands folded and be spoon-fed. Now spoon-feeding is fine, for babies. It is natural; it is normal; it is a beautiful manifestation of helpless need and loving care. But spoon-feeding for adults is a sad tragedy of retardation.

It has been announced for a year exactly what chapters we would read and consider in our classes this week. How many have diligently and prayerfully studied those chapters so as to

be able to benefit themselves and others? We will not ask for a show of hands.

To what extent do we comprehend a living sacrifice? And then there is the practical side of the work of the body. The tendency of the diabolos within us is to lazily, selfishly leave it to others. Which one is winning the battle within us—the diabolos or the spirit? When volunteers are called for to help with the work, there should be an eager deluge of response. This is the infinite privilege of serving Christ, so that he may welcome us when he returns. It's reciprocal.

"When saw we thee hungry and did not feed thee?"

It should never be necessary to call for volunteers more than once. Cleaning the restrooms is equally important with giving the lectures. Both are necessary parts of the work of the body. To what extent do we comprehend a living sacrifice? Or, are we just drifting along to disaster in our selfish little dreamboat?

Fourth, the work of each as healthy living parts of the glorious body of Christ is a full time work. Where would the human body be—how long would it even endure, if the various parts decided they would only work part time—just as it appealed to their fancy?

A living sacrifice is not a part time thing—a hobby, an amusement, as we see fit. The Truth is not a spectator sport. It is all or nothing. The time available to us at best is so terribly brief, but it is enough if every minute is wisely and faithfully used.

In verses 8 to 10, he speaks of a different aspect of the works of the body. There are seven: prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhorting, giving, ruling, and showing mercy. Now was he speaking just of the first century gifts of the spirit, or the general gifts and talents of all for all time? And is he speaking just of the official ecclesial functions, or of the duties and privileges of all as essential members of the one body?

Surely, we must take the larger view in both cases. To restrict them to the spirit gifts is to rob them of any meaning and value for ourselves. Paul is speaking broadly of the essential living sacrifice that all—all must make who have any hope of life. And if we restrict them to the official ecclesial functions, we sow the fatal seeds of ecclesiasticism and the fleshly separation of clergy and laity.

These instructions are for all. The duties are for all. The glorious privilege of total, joyful labor and service is for all. And

the final, unspeakable, eternal reward is for all who discern and follow the narrow path of total dedication that leads to that reward. The living sacrifice. Paul lists seven. They clearly encompass all the activities of the life of service and holiness that God requires.

And we note that each one is qualified as to how it is to be done. There must not only be a doing, but it must be in the right way and to the right extent.

The first one, prophecy. This simply, and in essence, is speaking for the Word, proclaiming the Truth. It is a duty for all. Let him that heareth, say come. It takes many forms—public and private, oral and written. The conception of foretelling the future is but a minor and secondary meaning of the word prophecy.

The qualification: "*Let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith.*" This is the measure of faith of verse 3—the ability, opportunity, and capacity for active manifestation of faith that each is given. Faith lives only by work. We all have far more capacity than we ever use. Some day we shall have to give an account.

Second, ministry. The original is "*diakonia*", from which we get deacon. This is the practical end—all the actual work and labor that must be done to enable the body to function usefully and constructively. Much of it is in the background and unseen, the meals and buildings, the supplies and arrangements. This gathering could not function effectively without a tremendous amount of this work by somebody.

Note that this is put second, right after prophesying and before teaching and exhorting. Now these different aspects of the work of the body are not necessarily put in strict order of importance. But certainly it is significant that the practical labor is high on the list.

Third, teaching. That is, explaining and instructing—the next step beyond prophesying or proclaiming. Certainly there is much overlapping. These are not strict, water-tight compartments. But Paul is outlining the general range of the work of the body, and emphasizing that God in His wisdom has made some members more capable of one thing and some of another, to enforce the mutual interdependence.

It is very good for the unity of the body, when we find and freely recognize that others can do certain things much better than we can. However, we must be sure, very sure, that the dif-

ference is not just a matter of greater effort, greater zeal, greater self-discipline on the part of the one who appears to excel. All too often, this is the case. We never use a fraction of our capabilities. We lazily attribute more inspiration, when it is really just a matter of more perspiration.

Fourth, exhortation. There seems rather a fine line between teaching and exhortation, because each should contain a measure of the other. Teaching is sterile without exhortation. And exhortation is shallow and weak without teaching. But Paul does mention them separately, for they are two aspects of the work.

Exhortation is an important aspect of the mutual work of the body, within and upon itself. The word is "*parakaleo*", which is the verb that corresponds to the noun "*parakletos*." We're familiar with that. It's usually translated "*comforter*." It is the term Christ used for the Holy Spirit which he would send to guide the Apostles. Literally, it means to call to one's side: *parakaleo*, or to call near.

Now literal derivations are not always particularly helpful. But in this case, it is good; it is essential to bear in mind that the word means to call near, to call to one's side.

We mention this, because if this is not the intention and result, to cause a closeness, to close a gap, to draw both understanding and affection close together, it has not fulfilled the true function of scriptural exhortation. Its meaning is not limited simply to comfort.

It also means to warn, beseech, guide, exhort, to induce to take a certain course of action by a line of reason. And it is not limited to the platform. We are instructed to exhort one another daily. That is, we are to constantly warn, beseech, and guide one another.

Now it would be obvious that this is a potentially dangerous instrument. Unskillfully used, it can degenerate into mere harping and criticism, and can result in resentment and estrangement. Therefore, it must always be tested by its root meaning of causing to draw near.

If an exhortation is not sincerely intended and designed to cause a greater closeness, a drawing together between speaker and hearer, both of understanding and agreement on the one side and also of mutual communion and love on the other, or if, though so intended, it does not have that result, but the very opposite result, then it is a spiritual failure. And worse than a

failure, it is not a true, effective exhortation. It has done harm instead of good. It has not drawn together.

Paul, as he opens this chapter, uses exactly the same word, although there it is translated "beseech". Paul's exhortation is very strong and searching, but it does not cause offence or widen the gap. Because it is brotherly, because it is affectionate, because it is obviously according to truth and holiness, because he lifts it in reverence to the spiritual plain of God's mercy—God's glorious mercy—and because it is clearly designed to strengthen the bonds of closeness and fellowship.

"I beseech you therefore, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice . . . which is your reasonable service."

We Know That the Law Is Spiritual

"Do we make void the Law? . . . Rather, we establish the Law!" (Rom. 3:31).

The Law, says Paul, was "*Holy, just and good*" (Rom. 7:12). He says it was "*ordained unto life*" (Rom. 7:10). Like David (Psa. 119:77, 97), he said he "*delighted in the Law*" (Rom. 7:22). But elsewhere he calls it a "*ministration of death*" (2 Cor. 3:7), a "*ministration of condemnation*" (2 Cor. 3:9) and a "*yoke of bondage*" (Gal. 5:1). He notes this apparent paradox—

"Is the Law sin? . . . Was then that which is good made death unto me?" (Rom. 7:7, 13).

Can we blame the Law for sin and death, and the failure of man to attain to the life which was ordained by the Law? In both cases he immediately answers, "*God forbid!*", or more correctly, "*Let it not be!*" Do not entertain such a God-dishonoring thought, for the Law was a holy ordinance of God. He says—

"We know the Law is spiritual; but I am CARNAL, sold under sin" (Rom 7:14).

The Law was ordained to life. It was man who failed. The Law had its perfect fulfilment in Christ. It was designed for him, and he for it. *But the Law could not give life to even a perfectly righteous man without first an atoning death.* This arose from a condition previous to the Law which the Law itself was powerless to correct. At the very moment of birth, the Law recognized the condemnation that man was born into, and the penalty already due.

Even for the birth of Jesus, Mary must be unclean thirty-three days and then offer a sin offering—"*A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons*" (Lk. 2:24). Those turtledoves had no efficacy except in the sacrifice they foreshadowed. "*The Law made nothing perfect,*" but it *signified the way by which perfection must come.*

It may be said that even Christ himself came under the curse of the Law, for "*Cursed is everyone that hangeth upon a tree*" (Gal. 3:13). This is true, and is one of the marvelous details of the working out of God's wonderfully intricate plan, but here again *it was sin, and not the Law, that was to blame.* This particular ordinance of the Law was perfectly just. But sin banded together and hanged an innocent man. The Law did not contemplate the hanging of the innocent. Only sin could do that.

And here is one of the places where we can legitimately make a distinction between the spirit and the letter. The obvious spirit and intention of the Law was, "*Cursed is everyone that is DESERVEDLY hanged on a tree.*" Christ personally in character was free from the slightest shadow of a stigma of this curse in its true intention.

Did he then just come under the letter and not the spirit of the curse, and forfeit the life to which the Law was ordained by an unjust legal technicality? This would not be a fitting ingredient in God's great and glorious plan. His death was to declare the *righteousness* of God, and this could not be done by merely fulfilling the *letter* in violation of the *spirit*. God's arrangements are not technical and mechanical, but living and in harmony with truth.

As a strong, sinless, voluntary representative and covering for his weak but humble and repentant brethren, Christ's sacrifice was beautiful and just. He became a curse for us, not merely when the technicality of the breaking of the Law was fulfilled in the actual crucifixion but when he freely presented himself in obedience to the Father's will as the Redeemer on whom the history and destiny of the race was centered.

"Our old man is crucified with him" (Rom. 6:6).

There was no technicality about the curse on this old man. The crucifixion on the cross was the symbol and climax of a life-long victory in the crucifixion of the flesh. That flesh came under the just condemnation of the Law, and hung upon the tree in perfect justice.

These thoughts arise from a consideration of Deuteronomy 22. With David we are led to exclaim—

"Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out Thy Law!" (Psa. 119:18).

"Thou shalt not see thy brother's ox or his sheep go astray, and hide thyself from them: thou shalt in any case bring them again unto thy brother" (Deut. 22:1).

The meaning of "*brother*" here has the same broad, liberal intent that Christ placed on the word "*neighbor*," for in Exodus 23:4, 5 the same command is worded—

"If thou meet thine ENEMY'S ox or his ass going astray, thou shalt surely bring it back to him again. If thou see the ass of HIM THAT HATETH THEE lying under his burden, and wouldest forbear to help him, thou shalt surely help with him."

Could a law of this character be found in force anywhere in the world today? What of the so-called Christian nations who

seek to pervert the Old Testament into a justification of their ungodly wars? God's people went to war at *God's* command for purposes that *God* decided, and at *God's* command they be refrained. When God commanded Zedekiah and the children of Israel to submit to the domination of the wicked Nebuchadnezzar, they brought God's anger and punishment upon themselves by a misguided resistance. They felt that, in the wars that God had previously sanctioned, they had ample justification and precedent, *but they did not grasp the underlying principles*. They only had half the picture, and they destroyed themselves in misguided zeal.

It is the principles behind the commands that we must grasp and apply. The Law was holy, just and good. Christ came, not to destroy it, but to fulfill it in all its beauty. "*Do we then make void the Law?*" asks Paul (Rom. 3:31). Again that same emphatic, "*God forbid—Let it not be so!*" "*Rather, we ESTABLISH the Law.*" And he explains that God, through Christ—

"Condemned sin in the flesh: THAT THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE LAW MIGHT BE FULFILLED IN US"
(Rom. 8:3, 4).

The principle in the first command in Deuteronomy 22 is identical with the principle of Jesus' beautiful words on the Mount—

"Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you"
(Matt. 5:44).

This is the new-old commandment that Jesus brought—new in that it has so rarely been used or understood, old in that they had had it from the beginning.

"The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth to a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garments; for all that do so are an abomination unto the Lord thy God"
(Deut. 22:5).

This word "*abomination*" is a very strong term. It denotes utter abhorrence. The principle here is crystal-clear. Each sex has its proper place in the all-wise arrangements of God, and each in its place is beautiful and fitting and a glory to God, but for either to attempt to fill the position that God has designated for the other is intensely displeasing to Him. The world, in a misguided zeal for what it terms equality, uses all its powers to destroy the individuality and distinction and complementary harmony that God has created in making man and woman, "*In all its works, the world knows not God.*"

"When thou buildest a new house, then thou shalt make a battlement for thy roof, that thou bring not blood upon thine house, if any man fall from thence" (v. 8).

Responsibility. "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen. 4:9). The principle here is that we are responsible for others to the extent that our actions do or could affect them. We think of Jesus' solemn words—

"But whoso shall offend—or cause to offend—one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matt. 18:6).

And Paul's inspired commentary upon this—

"If meat make my brother to offend, I WILL EAT NO FLESH WHILE THE WORLD STANDETH" (1 Cor 8:13).

"It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak" (Rom. 14:21).

We cannot run away from this heavy responsibility—

"For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself" (Rom. 14:7).

Every action, and every failure to act when action is called for, will have its effect upon others which we must answer for. It is easier to build a house without a parapet around the roof. It has certain advantages. We may feel quite safe ourselves, but God says that *in whatever we build the protecting wall must be there for the sake of others who may not be as surefooted or as quick to perceive the dividing line as we.*

"Thou shalt not sow thy vineyard with divers seed" (Deut. 22:9).

Here again the principle is unmistakable—

"Thou shalt not sow thy vineyard with divers seed: LEST THE FRUIT OF THY SEED WHICH THOU HAST SOWN, AND THE FRUIT OF THY VINEYARD, BE DEFILED."

"The seed is the Word of God," said Jesus. "If any man preach any other Gospel, let him be ACCURSED" (Gal. 1:9). Hard words indeed, but they are not ours; they are the necessary words of warning from God. In all the world, there is no hope of life except in the true seed. Whoever contributes in the slightest way to the contamination of that seed is a *murderer*, however exalted his intentions may be. This is a matter of life and death. *Very, very few things in this world really matter or are important, but here is one that is vital.*

Whoever we cannot conscientiously welcome to the table of the Lord has another Gospel. We dare not encourage them, nor

bid them Godspeed. It is neither kindness to them nor ourselves, nor faithfulness to God, to allow the seriousness of the issue to be lost in a haze of ill-advised fraternization. We are stewards and custodians of something far more important than ourselves. Great plainness of speech is called for, although at the same time great kindness and forbearance.

It is always easy to condemn and destroy, but to build takes time and work. Those who by nature are firm have a natural tendency to be harsh and bitter: those who by nature are soft have a tendency to be easy and compromising. Whatever comes naturally to us must be distrusted, for in our flesh dwells no good thing. There are no natural virtues. The flesh lusteth against the Spirit. *To pride ourselves on our natural reactions—whatever they are—is to glory in our shame.* We are only safe when we are consciously restraining nature and following the Spirit's expressed instructions contrary to nature.

"Thou shalt not plow with an ox and an ass together"
(Deut. 22:10).

"Doth God take care for oxen? or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written"
(1 Cor. 9:9, 10).

An ox and an ass. Clean and unclean, a true believer and one with another Gospel. Can they plow together? Can they have joint activities? Can they join hands in anything and expect God's favor and blessing? What saith the Scripture?

"Thou shalt not wear a garment of divers sorts, as of woolen and linen together" (v. 11).

A variation of the same basic principle, with certain different aspects. What could possibly be wrong with a mixture of weaving materials? God is simply *driving home the same old lesson*—purity, separation, holiness—over and over again, even to the point of not mixing in their clothing—a mixed covering—a mixed protection—a mixed dependence—*wool and linen*: the natural, fleshly, animal covering, or the Spirit's white garment.

If God is our covering, it must be God alone. We must choose, and be faithful to that choice. *"I would that ye were hot or cold!"* (Rev. 3:15). Be all the way inside or all the way outside. To stand in the doorway discourages those that are inside and hinders those that are outside. It is belittling to God's Holy Truth, and a mockery of God. How often that lesson is repeated and still it is so hard to learn!

The Letter Killeth

"A minister of the New Covenant: not of the letter, but of the Spirit: for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life" (2 Cor. 3:6).

There is a great lesson in this but it is often sadly misapplied to the detriment of holiness and encouragement of looseness. In the first place, we should note very particularly that the Scriptures never speak of the *commands of Christ* as the "*letter that killeth*." Rather Jesus says—

"The words that I speak unto you, they are SPIRIT, and they are life" (Jn. 6:63).

The "*letter that killeth*" was the *Mosaic Law*—the "*law of carnal commandments*"—designed specifically to expose and manifest man's sinful, rebellious nature, and to humble him before his Almighty and Holy Maker. And even then we must be very careful how we look upon the letter of *this* Law, for the Law was "*holy, just and good*" (Rom. 7:12). Jesus said (Matt. 23:23)—

"This (the spirit of the Law) ought ye to have done, and NOT TO LEAVE THE OTHER (the letter) UNDONE."

He condemned them—not for obeying the letter—but for glorifying the letter *to the exclusion and neglect of the spirit* which the letter was intended to develop and teach. To the Ephesian ecclesia, the Spirit says (Rev. 2:2-5)—

"I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience . . . BUT—thou hast left thy first love . . . Repent or I will come and remove thy candlestick."

There is the letter without the spirit. If love is not the motive force, then works, labor, and patience are not only useless, but are *obnoxious* to God, for they just glorify the flesh. Therefore, God cannot acknowledge a candlestick—no matter how bright—that is shining by its own self-glorifying efforts, and not truly and consciously by the power of the Spirit of God.

Whatever we are doing, the moment we let slip the consciousness that God gives all the increase, and that all power, both to will and to do, is of God—then we cease to serve God or to be of any value to Him because we cease to glorify Him, and begin to glorify ourselves.

* * *

We must have a viewpoint regarding the "*letter that killeth*" that does not do dishonor to God's holy Law given through Moses, nor to God's own eternal goodness and kindness as manifested in all His works, including that Law.

Killing, or death, is always by and through *SIN*. Therefore the killing part of the letter must be due to man, the sinner. Paul explains clearly how the letter kills (Rom. 7:9-13)—

"For I was alive without the Law once . . ."

—that is before he reached the age of knowledge and responsibility—before the Law and all its lessons and implications broke upon his consciousness—

" . . . but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And the commandment, which was ordained to LIFE, I found to be unto DEATH.

"For SIN, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me.

"The Law is holy, just and good. Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But SIN, that it might appear sin, WORKING DEATH IN ME BY THAT WHICH IS GOOD."

That is how "the letter killeth." When we look into it and get the true picture of what it means, we find *no justification at all* for the very popular orthodox interpretation of this passage—that carefulness to observe the letter of God's law kills, and we can quite safely ignore the "letter of the law" if we fulfil what *we think* is the "spirit of the law."

This is a very common, but very unsound and dangerous interpretation, very pleasing to the self-will of the flesh. It is particularly dangerous because this thought is so deeply ingrained into this passage in the world's eyes that we are apt quite unconsciously to adopt the world's view.

But the true meaning does not convey this thought at all—by the letter of God's Holy Law man was and is condemned, that is the whole *purpose* of the Law, as Paul explains in writing to the Romans; then by God's grace man is redeemed from condemnation, and given the power, by the Spirit, to fulfil the required righteousness of the Law by Jesus Christ.

The Law of Moses, says Paul (2 Cor. 3:7), was a "*ministration of death.*" Why? Because—

"Israel could not look TO THE END" (v. 13).

Moses' face shone with the glory of God, and Israel was afraid to look at him, and he had to cover his face—he had to *conceal the glory that was the end of the Law*—the "end" of the Law in two senses that are really one: for that glory manifested both the Law's *termination* and the Law's whole *object and purpose*.

The Law itself was "*ordained to life,*" as we have seen from Paul's remarks in Romans 7. In what way was a "*ministration of death*" ordained to *life*?

It brought death that it might lead to life. It brought humility that it might lead to exaltation. Paul says it was *schoolmaster*. What were the lessons that it taught?

First of all, it taught God's infinite majesty and holiness; then it taught sin's sinfulness and ugliness, and man's helplessness because of the power of sin; and then it taught God's abounding love and mercy in the providing of the way to life through sacrifice and forgiveness. This is what Paul is endeavoring to show to the Roman brethren—the beautiful and essential place of the Law in the all-wise Divine pattern of salvation in Christ Jesus.

But they "*could not look to the end.*" Because of the veil of the flesh they could not see the glory of the Spirit. They could not see Christ, who was the end and purpose and whole living meaning of every type and ordinance of the Law.

The holy, and just, and good Law awakened in them no recognition of their weakness and helplessness and need—their need for the Saviour, the God-provided Lamb, the great High Priest, the Mercy seat (or "*Place of Mercy*"), the Laver of Purification, the Altar of Sacrifice and the Altar of Prayer. They felt no need—and so the beautiful Law that God had given them failed—through the self-satisfied blindness of the flesh. But it did not really fail.

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"The letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life" (2 Cor. 3:6).

The law of Christ must be applied in the *Spirit* of Christ. This holy, flesh-mortifying law, applied in any other way than the loving, humble spirit of Christ, is a terrible, destroying thing.

But still the law *must be applied*. It must be honored and upheld. We are doing Christ no service when we slur over his law in a mistaken application of what we consider love and mercy on the plea that the "*letter killeth.*" *There is nothing killing about the letter of Christ's law*, properly understood and applied. Rather we die without it.

It *should* never be necessary for an ecclesia to enforce Christ's law. It *should* never be necessary to apply the command—

"If thy brother trespass, rebuke him" (Lk. 17:3).

It *should* never be necessary to apply—

"Put away from yourselves that wicked person" (1 Cor. 5:13).

The law of Christ was never meant to be applied in this way. It was meant rather to be received in every minute detail *eagerly and lovingly and anxiously* by every one who takes upon himself the great and holy Name of Jesus.

Why is it that the transforming glories of this holy and Divine law are so often received so reluctantly among us? The answer lies in the deceitfulness of the flesh and the earthy, downward pull of the natural, animal mind.

James calls this law the "*perfect law of liberty*" (Jas. 1:25). A deeper and more accurate description could not be devised. Here are three interwoven and inseparable principles—*perfection, law, and liberty*. How—we may ask in our natural ignorance—how can there be *liberty* as long as there is *law*? Is not an imposed law *restriction*, and is not liberty *freedom from restriction*?

But the mind of the Spirit reveals to us that *there can never be true liberty without perfect obedience to perfect law*. Jesus said—

"Come unto me; learn to be free by submitting to my yoke" (Jn. 8:32; Matt. 11:29).

Those that heard him answered in their darkness, "*We want no yoke. We ARE free. We have never been in bondage*" (Jn. 8:33). But Jesus said to them (v. 34)—

"Whosoever committeth sin is the SLAVE OF SIN."

All men are miserable, helpless slaves until Christ's law and power sets them free from the power of sin within themselves. What is *sin*? "*Sin,*" says John, "*is transgression of Divine law*" (1 Jn. 3:4)—anything out of harmony with the Divine will and way. And sin is slavery unto death.

So there is no perfect freedom outside of perfect obedience to God's perfect law. Any deviation from that line means—to just that extent—slavery and loss of true liberty. Whenever we yield to the desires of the flesh, we are not (as we proudly fancy) enjoying our freedom—we are rather publicly confessing our miserable slavery to an evil, dominating, gloating master, who finally mocks us with the wages of death for our craven service to him. Just looking ahead a few verses in this third chapter of second Corinthians, we see that Paul says (v. 17)—

"Where the Spirit of the Lord is, THERE is liberty"

Liberty from law? No. We cannot have liberty without law. We cannot be free without knowing and fulfilling the law, although the more freely we accept the law and the more we absorb it within us and adjust our lives to its wisdom and light, the less it becomes law. Law, we are told (1 Tim. 1:9)—

"Is not for the righteous, but for the lawless and disobedient."

Is this a contradiction to what we have seen about the "*perfect law of liberty*?" No. We are all "*lawless*" to begin with—law is to *create* the righteous man. But to those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, it is not law, but wisdom; it has no penalties, but only blessings.

* * *

The ministration of condemnation was glorious (2 Cor. 3:9). Where was its glory? In the face of Moses, the *mediator* of that law (v. 7). But it was a fading glory; there was nothing permanent about it; it was a surface, super-imposed glory—a temporary manifestation of God's glory—a shadowy type of the eternal "*glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*" (2 Cor. 4:6).

Why was it in Moses' face? Because he had appeared before God to plead on their behalf (Ex. 32:11), and through Moses God forgave them and accepted them and entered into a covenant of life with them (Ex. 34:9-10).

They had, by transgression, forfeited God's blessing, and had made themselves subject to His righteous and necessary judgment on sin. God was about to destroy them, but the fervent, effectual prayer of a righteous man saved them.

Someone was found for whose sake God could righteously forgive them, and allow mercy to triumph over justice without destroying or violating justice. So their glory was in the face of Moses their saviour, who brought them a law from God that could lead them back to life.

But they *could not see where the glory of the Law lay*. They could not see to the end of the Law (3:13, 14).

"For Christ is the end of the Law for everyone that hath faith" (Rom. 10:4).

That is, the discerning eye of faith. They lacked it, and therefore they failed. Whether they fought against the Law or whether they set themselves to obey every jot and tittle, still they failed.

The letter killed them, either one way or the other, because they worshipped and glorified the letter as an *end in itself*. The law was given to teach them the great wisdom of humility—to lead them to recognize their helplessness and need. They used it to feed their pride and gratify their self-sufficiency.

They forgot the great and culminating yearly sacrifice for sin ". . . burned 'without the camp.'"

Are we ever so foolish as to measure ourselves against the perfect law of holiness with even a passing flash of self satisfaction? Let us *look to the end*, and not fail like blind Israel. The end and purpose of the law is still the same—to teach us

our natural helplessness and to lead us to the power of God in Christ, as Paul so beautifully describes in the last verse (18)—

"WE all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, ARE CHANGED INTO THE SAME IMAGE FROM GLORY TO GLORY, even as BY THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD."

The law of Christ is given so that weak, ugly, animal man may be led to a gradual transformation by the power of the Spirit into the image of Christ.

It is only while, by constant effort, we are keeping our minds and thoughts directly focused on the Divine glory in the face of Jesus that essential process of spiritual transformation occurs. As soon as we look away, it stops.

Unhappily, it is only too possible to be in an ecclesia for years and years in a stagnant, preoccupied, self-satisfied state, and never make *any* progress in spiritual transformation. How much closer are *we* to this Divine image than we were a year ago? How much have we grown in godliness? How much better do we comprehend—and manifest before men—the mind of Christ? It is relatively easy to "*talk the Truth*" to others, but how much of its true and gentle and holy spirit do we *show* to them in our lives? *That* is "*preaching the Truth*" in its fulness.

What we call "*doctrine*" (although actually it is an artificial distinction, for all teaching and commands are doctrine)—what we call "*doctrine*" is truly important, yea, it is essential, but dead "*doctrine*" without the living spirit of holiness and love is but an ugly repulsive, rattling skeleton.

What about those of us who have supposedly been going through this glorious, spiritual transforming process for ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty or more years? What results have we to show? For in the end the sole test of the value and success of our lives will be: *Has this process really occurred within us?*

Paul says (2 Cor. 4:4) speaking of some—

"In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them."

Belief is a matter of *action* and *way of life*, not of words and profession, as James so searchingly points out. Is it possible that *we* are among those unfortunates whom the god of this world (the veil of the flesh) has blinded, so that we are missing in our lives the Divine, transforming glories of Christ?—

"If our Gospel be hid (veiled—it is the same word), it is hid to them that are lost" (v. 3).

It is so easy to have the Gospel, but to be veiled from its power. Israel is our great lesson to teach humility and carefulness. Though exposed to the direct glories of the Law for *hundreds and hundreds of years*—though memorizing and contending about every jot and tittle—they never reached the goal to which the Law was intended to lead them, because they had a *"veil upon their heart."*

The veil, of course, is the flesh—the motions of the flesh—blocking off the vision of, and entrance into, the Most Holy Place. Christ alone was able to seize this veil in strong, Divinely-guided hands, and tear it from top to bottom—*from top to bottom*—the power was from above.

It was death for any but the High Priest to enter the Holy of Holies. It was death to even look with open face upon the Ark, as fifty thousand men of Bethshemesh proved at the cost of their lives (1 Sam. 6:19). But Paul says (Heb. 10:19)—

"Having therefore boldness to enter into the Holiest, by the blood of Jesus."

Boldness to enter into the Holiest! Boldness—not presumption or brazenness, but loving, intimate confidence and assurance—to look with open face upon the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, the living Ark! Paul says (2 Cor. 3:12)—

"Seeing then we have such hope, we use great plainness (marg.: boldness) of speech."

Great boldness of speech—in two ways: first, speaking confidently and intimately of holy things that Israel hardly dared to mention, and second, speaking with great plainness and *seriousness* about the tremendous responsibilities involved.

Do we realize the great and fearful holiness of our calling? Do we forget the elaborate carefulness and sanctification in all details that was required of the High Priest when he entered the Most Holy, *"that he die not?"* And not only at that time, but at all times. Everything had to be *exactly as God specified*—not because there was any intrinsic importance in the ritual itself, but because of the great importance of carefulness and obedience in the realities of character that these shadows typified.

What *do* these things typify? What is the essential reality they teach? Can we *"see to the end?"* Or, shall we, too, fail? God said, as the smoke of His anger still arose from the burnt bodies of Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:3)—

"I WILL be sanctified in them that come nigh Me, and before all the people I WILL be glorified"

God has not changed. We have assembled ourselves into ecclesias solely for the purpose of sanctifying and glorifying God, and drawing nigh unto Him in the sight of all the people.

We claim to be a genuine epistle of Christ written to men by the Spirit of God. This is the figure Paul uses in the early verses of this chapter. As such, we *must* cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit—all unclean and worldly habits and ways of thought.

If our claim to be a genuine epistle written by the power of the Spirit is justified by the actual *facts*, there is no more glorious and beautiful thing than such an assembly, all knit together in love, all seeking God's glory and each other's welfare, all submitting to each other and *striving earnestly to avoid doing anything that would mar the mutual holiness, or distress one another.*

Let us dwell upon this last thought—the sincere and Christlike desire to avoid grieving or offending our brethren. There are many powerful arguments against worldly things, habits, and activities, but none more powerful than Paul's beautiful declaration—

"While the world standeth, I will not do anything that will offend or distress my brother" (1 Cor. 8:13).

Truly such a body of people is an *"epistle of Christ written by the Spirit of the living God"*—a peculiar people, a holy nation, a royal priesthood, created and ordained of God for the purpose of good works to the honor and glory of His Name.

Nothing is sadder than when—with all the *external* necessities prepared and supplied—all the *"doctrine"*—all the ecclesial framework and organization—this divine ideal fails to materialize in its spiritual beauty because the veil of the flesh interposes and there is coldness and darkness and pettiness and smallness where the marvellous light of God's glory should be flooding and permeating all.

* * *

"We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us" (2 Cor. 4:7).

The vessel exists solely to contain and display the treasure. The vessel has no value or glory or purpose in itself. *The vessel is intentionally made valueless and weak.* It was essential that Paul should be weak and poor and despised and buffeted, as

was his Master before him. This was necessary to his value to God, and his fellowship with Christ, and so he "*gloried in his infirmities,*" perceiving the divine wisdom behind them.

No one was swayed by Paul's oratory; no one was attracted by his wealth; no one was awed by his position or worldly ability. To the natural man he carried not a spark of influence or authority. He was, as he said (1 Cor. 4:13)—

"As the filth of the world, and the offscouring of all things."

Purposely, in the wisdom of God, he possessed nothing to attract the natural man. But to those few among men who discerned real and spiritual values, this insignificant wanderer on the Roman highways brought a treasure of eternal and inestimable worth. These were the ones into whose hearts God had shined—

"God hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6).

No one should ever be the same again, once God has shined into their hearts the light of His glory. All bitterness and selfishness should be melted away. All smallness and pettiness and interest in present things should disappear.

For what else can be compared with the shining of God's own glory into a man's heart, relating him to a splendid and eternal order of things, and starting forces in motion within him that will lead him upward and upward until he stands in immortal and resplendent glory, clothed with the Divine nature?

Paul grasped the overwhelming reality of these things, and lived every moment of his life completely saturated with this spiritual atmosphere. Little wonder, then, that he could say, quite simply and unaffectedly, even amid a life of almost unparalleled suffering and tribulation (v. 17)—

*"Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."
"Though our outward man perish," he says (v. 16), "yet the inward man is renewed day by day."*

The outlook of Paul is always refreshingly exalted and spiritual. The great majority are so much more concerned about the welfare, comfort and appearance of the perishing outward man; but Paul had clearer vision, and he calls to all down through the ages into whose hearts the all-sufficient glory of God has shined (v. 18)—

"We look not at the things which are seen, but the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."

Let us endeavor to live wholly in this wholesome, spiritual atmosphere with Paul, viewing all things from the eternal viewpoint and keeping the cleansing glory of God shining into our hearts. There *are* eternal things—things that the natural eye sees not—glorious, endless things that are offered to us freely. Paul says in verse 15—

"ALL THINGS ARE FOR YOUR SAKES, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God.

"All things are for your sakes . . . All things are yours . . . the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come — ALL ARE YOURS, and YE ARE CHRIST'S AND CHRIST IS GOD'S" (1 Cor. 3:21-23).

Why, then, with this priceless glory of God streaming freely into our hearts, should we sit down among the ashes and seek after empty, earthy things?

Grace Be Unto You, and Peace

*"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
Who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings
in heavenly places" (Eph. 1:3).*

Paul's letter to the Ephesians is perhaps the highest expression of the joys that constitute the spiritual blessings in heavenly places.

It was written many years before the Spirit had occasion through John to remind this ecclesia of its lost first love. Those among them who were moved by John's warning words from Patmos would doubtless read again this earlier epistle of Paul. They would remember those purer and happier days. They would remember Paul's tearful parting words of warning when he saw them for the last time at Miletus, words which at the time perhaps seemed unnecessarily ominous—

"Take heed therefore unto yourselves . . . for I KNOW this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock" (Acts 20:29).

And they would remember too, that Jesus himself had said, shortly before he left them—

"The love of the many shall wax cold" (Matt. 24:12, R.V.).

Time would take its toll. Other things would claim the attention. The original enthusiasm would slowly disappear, and the light stand, no longer zealously tended, would gradually flicker out. How slowly! But how surely and how deadly!

"Thou hast left thy first love" (Rev. 2:4).

A watchman slumbering at his post with a cold, empty lamp in his hand!

But none of this had begun when this epistle was written. All is light and joy and Paul writes freely and warmly of the things nearest to his heart—of the things he desired to share with the Corinthians, but could not because they were yet carnal and had to be carefully fed with milk as babes.

He writes of the deep things of the glorious, predestinating purpose of God in Christ. He writes of the fellowship of the mystery, of the multitudinous unity of the Spirit, of the love of Christ which passeth all knowledge and which constrained Paul to superhuman effort and endurance on behalf of his brethren.

He writes of the fulness of God with which they were filled and by which they were gloriously strengthened with might

in the inner man, and of the wonderful time in the future to which all creation was painfully travailing when God would gather together in one all things in Christ.

Contemplating their love and faith and unalloyed zeal, he ceases not to give thanks unto God continually, and he prays that they may fully know within themselves the inexpressible joys of the working of His mighty power.

* * *

“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints.”

—the separated ones, the holy people—*“Be ye holy even as I am holy, saith the Lord.”*

“. . . to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 1:1).

Paul broadens his salutation to include not only the holy ones in Ephesus, but also that select and blessed few who in all ages come under the category of *“the faithful in Christ Jesus.”* Does this include us, too? Are we among the *“faithful in Christ Jesus”*?

Faithful means many things. First, it means *“firm in belief,”* having the full assurance of faith, unquestioning and undoubting, single-minded adherence to God’s Word.

“Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he that cometh to God MUST BELIEVE” (Heb. 11:6).

Secondly, it means *“true to one’s word”*—faithfully fulfilling one’s promises and obligations.

“Faithful is He that calleth you, Who also will do it” (1 Thess. 5:24).

“The Lord thy God, He is God, the faithful God which keepeth covenant and mercy” (Deut. 7:9).

Third, faithful means *“stedfast in the face of temptation,”* holding firm and unmoved come what may.

“Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life” (Rev. 2:10).

Then faithful means *“trustworthy in guarding what has been entrusted,”* and diligent in its use.

“He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust in much” (Lk. 16:10).

“It is required in a steward that a man be found faithful” (1 Cor. 4:2).

Let us remind ourselves of that—the little things are just as important as the big things for all is a matter of *principle*. Often,

indeed, the little things are *more* important than the large things, and little sins worse than big ones. Why? Because while big transgressions may be the result of human weakness under great pressure, the little ones are often a sign of just plain heedlessness and lost love and enthusiasm for God.

It is the little sins and little services that paint the true picture of the heart; the daily acts of faith or faithlessness, unaffected by either momentary stress or momentary enthusiasm.

Many of God's faithful committed grievous transgressions—they fell low, but when they came to themselves He received them again with joy, for He knew that their hearts were set upon Him and their life was bound up in His, though they were overcome for a while.

Again, faithful means "*trusting and dependent*"—unwavering confidence and reliance.

"If God so clothe the grass of the field . . . how much more will He clothe you, ye of little faith?" (Matt. 6:30).

"Why are ye fearful, ye of little faith?" (Matt. 8:26).

And, finally, faithful means "*true and constant in affection*," having the entire heart and mind firmly fixed upon an object of devotion. It means steadfastness in love. This perhaps is the foundation of all its other means—the basis or motive power of all, for "*Faith*," says Paul (Gal. 5:6), "*worketh by love*."

Such then are the faithful in Christ Jesus; the ones to whom Paul is speaking throughout this epistle; the ones for whom these blessings are reserved—

"This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (1 Jn. 5:4).

By this we can measure ourselves.

* * *

Verse 3: "*Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.*"

What is grace? What mental pictures does the word create? It is difficult to define. It carries the atmosphere of harmony, and loveliness, and courtesy, and kindness, and gentleness. It is, in brief, godliness of deportment.

From grace we derive two related words—graceful and gracious. Graceful is defined as "*displaying beauty in form or action*," that is, grace of body; while gracious means displaying beauty of the mind and character.

"Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father."

"Be clothed with humility," counsels Peter (1 Pet. 5:5), "*for God giveth grace to the humble.*" And John records with an awe that is ever-new—

“The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (Jn. 1:14).

That is the ideal combination. Grace *and* Truth. It is easy to stress one to the exclusion of the other, and some tend to err one way and some the other, but neither Grace nor Truth is complete alone. Christendom at large makes much of Grace, but cares little for Truth. But Grace alone, though pleasant, has no eternal value. It must cling to the sturdy stock of Truth to give it vitality and purpose.

Likewise Truth without Grace is like light without warmth. It is frigid and unmoving. It is easy to be convinced without being aroused, and if we convinced someone without arousing them, *we only add to their condemnation without showing them the power to rise out of it.*

The multiplication table is truth, but it is without grace. It is possible, out of a desire to avoid the errors of Christendom, to present the Gospel of God in the same sterile fashion as a mathematical equation—to declare its truth with the implied attitude that: *“There it is, take it or leave it.”* This error must be carefully avoided, too.

“Let your speech be always with grace” (Col. 4:6).

“Speak that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers” (Eph. 4:29).

That must be the purpose of all that we say—

“To administer grace unto the hearers.”

Truth itself is indeed a worthy object of search and attention, but it is the grace we find woven throughout all the Truth of God that kindles our love and affection. Let us, then, as Peter counsels (2 Pet. 3:18)—

“Grow in grace, AND in knowledge.”

Let the two grow side by side, each helping the other.

“Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph. 1:2).

Peace—tranquillity, freedom from disturbance or agitation, calm, harmony, concord, exemption from fear. Not, as some picture it, an emotional vacuum, but a calm inner serenity that no external factor can touch. A serenity unshakably rooted in a perfect oneness with the Eternal Author of Peace. Jesus calmly said, in the dark night of agony and desertion that led to the cross—

“Peace I leave with you: MY peace I give you . . . Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid!” (Jn. 14:27).

Present conditions around us, both within the Household and without, emphasize the preciousness and blessing of peace. Not, of course, peace at any price—that is a fool's paradise—but true, well-grounded, God-given peace.

There are, of course, always those to whom the thought of peace does not appeal, those to whom excitement and pleasure have a much more tantalizing ring. But this is a limited and pitiable mentality. The thoughtful student soon realizes that God has so constituted us that our deepest and fullest happiness demands quiet peace of both mind and body and that, in this present life, it is the greatest blessing that God can give.

Now the Scriptures define certain elementary principles concerning peace, and the first is that, like every other good, *it doesn't just happen, but has definite causes*. Peace is not the toy of time and chance. It does not come to us as the caprice of the cycle of fortune. It is determined by law—fixed, divine law.

And furthermore, it is something that requires *working and planning and earnest effort*. It is, in a sense, a matter of learning and practice, just like any other worthwhile accomplishment. We must learn how, and then, by practice, develop our skill. We must be prepared to make a great, all-consuming effort, if we truly value the prize. The first relevant statement of Scripture is this—

"I make peace . . . I the Lord do these things" (Isa. 45:7).

This is lesson one. *True peace begins in God*. And lesson two is—

"There in NO PEACE, saith the Lord, to the wicked" (Isa. 48:22).

Peace is divinely bestowed in proportion to righteousness—

"GREAT PEACE have they which love Thy Law" (Psa. 119:165).

Loving the Law does not, of course, mean abstract admiration, for—

"THIS is the love of God, that we keep His commandments" (1 Jn. 5:3).

Solomon declares—

"My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments; for length of days, and long life, AND PEACE, shall they add unto thee" (Prov. 3:1, 2).

And Isaiah says—

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

Obedience, then, is the first key to peace. We must accept this primary fact at the outset, before we even begin to take the

course. It is inescapable, and the wise man will not kick against the pricks. The delicate balance of our minds and moods, that control which determines between tranquillity and turmoil is reserved within the almighty power of God.

We may ignore God's counsel and we may so arrange our outward circumstances by worldly provisions and guarantees that we seem assured against all the vagaries of chance, and peace appears to be inevitable, and men may envy us mightily, but still the divine verdict is, "*Thou fool.*"

An obedient heart—a heart that yearns to obey and to conform itself to the holiness of the object of its affection—is an essential prerequisite to peace. Paul says of them that obey not God—

"The WAY of peace have they not known" (Rom. 3:17).

They want it but it is hid from them. Paul says further we must—

"Follow after the things that make for peace" (Rom. 14:19).

Peace is *made*, and we must learn *how to make it*. If we would have peace, we must take the steps that lead to peace. It is not enough just to hope for it, and to pray for it. We must consciously set our course toward it, and we must keep moving along that course. Paul gets a step closer to telling us how when he says in this same epistle to the Romans (8:6)—

"To be SPIRITUALLY-MINDED is peace."

Peace is a state of the mind. It does not depend upon the things that happen to us. *They* can't give us peace or take it from us. Peace depends upon how we receive them, and react to them. It is godliness with contentment—doing right and being satisfied.

Zacharias, father of John the Baptist, said of Christ's birth—

"The dayspring from on high hath visited us . . . to guide our feet in the way of peace" (Lk. 1:78, 79).

Here again is the same thought—"*The WAY of peace.*" The dayspring to whom Zacharias refers reveals this way in Matthew 11:28, 29—

"Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me."

That is, *Copy me, Follow my example—*

". . . for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls."

"REST unto your souls" is a very good synonym for peace, and the way to it is, *"Be meek and lowly."* Take it easy. Be content with little. Leave the worrying to God. Settle back into the everlasting arms. Cast your care upon Him. Turn it all over to your Father. Give up the frantic struggle to keep up with the mad and endless treadmill.

Relax your grip upon the things that are vanishing, and let the world rush by. Don't look after it longingly, *because it isn't going anywhere*—but of course it doesn't know that.

"Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding . . . Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace" (Prov. 3:13, 17).

"To be spiritually-minded is peace" (Rom. 8:6).

"He that is spiritual discerneth all things" (1 Cor. 2:15).

This is the basis of his peace, and it is a real and genuine foundation. His peace is founded upon knowledge—the knowledge that—

"ALL things work together for good to them that love God" (Rom. 8:28).

It is only necessary to know the truth, and be really convinced of it, and *to live in harmony with it*, to achieve peace. It doesn't require self-deception. We don't have to pretend, or run away from the facts. We only need to stand well back and get a good clear picture of everything in its true proportion, and peace is the inevitable result.

Everything in God's universe is progressing according to schedule. There is nothing out of hand. God is in full control. The plan is rolling forward gloriously; and the present puppets which loom so large and self-important are but passing shadows.

And we've got to hold on to that picture! We must not let it fade away and be replaced by the sordid, distorted, fractional view that is apparent to our immediate senses.

Such, then, are the ingredients of peace. Supply these ingredients, and the desired result must follow. Let us list them.

First, *love*, for that is the root and mainspring of all virtue. Meaning, of course, true scriptural love—pure, zealous and intense, *"hating even the garment spotted by the flesh"*—love that is bigger and stronger than fear.

Then *obedience*: that naturally follows. That is the fruit that identifies the tree of love, and a tree is known by its fruits.

Third, *lowliness*—for there is no peace in struggling endlessly up toward barren and elusive pinnacles of empty glory. A relaxed sense of nothingness and powerlessness. A contentment to be of small account, knowing that man's puny accomplishments and vain honors are worthless in God's sight. The world cannot give us peace. Peace is in the hand of God, kept for His children alone.

"The Lord will bless His people with peace" (Psa. 29:11).

Fourth, *meekness*—mildness of temper, forbearance, humility, patience. True strength of character and power of mind. Self-control. Being big enough not to be petty and resentful.

"The meek also shall increase their joy in the Lord" (Isa. 29:19).

"He will beautify the meek with salvation" (Psa. 149:4).

"The hidden man of the heart . . . the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit" (1 Pet. 3:4).

Then *graciousness*—for if we are to have real peace our outward contacts must leave us with no inward regrets. We must learn to give of our best to everyone—to treat everyone with studied courtesy and kindness—never too big or too busy to be kind and considerate.

And this, to mean anything, *must be without regard to persons*. If angels ever deign to visit us unawares, they are not likely to come disguised as pompous bank directors or corporation presidents, but as very simple, common people.

Sixth, *wisdom*—vision and discernment, for peace requires a keen perception that pierces through the disquieting and deceptive outward appearance of things. We must live by the things that are not seen, for these are the *real things*. We must, with Moses, "*see Him who is invisible*" (Heb. 11:27).

Finally, *spiritual mindedness*—for peace is essentially a spiritual quality. The carnal mind never knows peace for it ever burns with an insatiable flame of bitterness and envy, lust and desire. Only God can calm the raging of the storm, and say to our troubled mind, "*Peace, be still.*"

"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee" (Isa. 26:3).

Such, then, are the seven pillars of the temple of peace, the seven keys to the garden of spiritual rest.

"Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 1:2).

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places" (Eph. 1:3).

It is these “*spiritual blessings*” in heavenly places that should fire our zeal to transform ourselves for God. Not so much for what God has done for us. Let us go deeper than that. *It is for the love that caused Him to do it.* Paul exclaims elsewhere, with an overflowing heart—

“*Thanks be to God for His unspeakable gift*” (2 Cor. 9:15).

“*We love Him,*” says John, “*because He first loved us*” (1 Jn. 4:19). His love is so intense and so electrifying that, when it meets a receptive heart, even this common clay cannot but be charged and transformed.

But it must be kept in the direct focus of that influence. Our light, like that of the moon, is only reflected glory, and fades quickly when the source is obscured. So again we perceive that *all* is of Him, even our love for Him.

What are these “*spiritual blessings in the heavenlies*” of which Paul speaks? They are summarized in John’s words—

“*Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on us, that we should be called the sons of God!*” (1 Jn. 3:1).

FULL adoption into the divine family, with all its privileges! He throws the door to Himself wide open. Sonship implies fellowship and communion, confidence and dependence. He could offer us no more than to offer us Himself. No higher honor. No greater blessing. And He gives it to us freely, merely upon our *promise to be faithful*, and to give Him in loving return the pitiful little we have to give—

“*All things are yours . . . the world, life, death, things present, things to come; ALL ARE YOURS!*” (1 Cor. 3:21, 22).

“*Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling . . . what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness!*” (Heb. 3:1; 2 Pet. 3:11).

Holiness, the divine eternal beauty of holiness, is the purpose of all this manifestation of love toward us. If it fails to move us to ceaseless and wholehearted efforts in that direction, it has missed its object and failed in its purpose. This is the end to which all is directed, as Paul continues here in Ephesians 1:4—

“*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.*”

That is the glorious secret of His purpose—a people perfected in holiness by love. Not by force or fear, but by love. Holiness is the watchword of the future. Even the bells of the horses are to be inscribed, *“Holiness to the Lord”* (Zech. 14:20).

“And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called the Way of Holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it” (Isa. 35:8).

And they shall sing with triumphant ecstasy—

“Who is like unto Thee, Lord, GLORIOUS IN HOLINESS? . . . Thou in Thy mercy hast led forth the people which Thou hast redeemed; Thou hast guided them in Thy strength unto Thy holy habitations” (Ex. 15:11-13).

Such was the Song of Moses, upon the deliverance of Israel, and such will be the Song of Moses and the Lamb.

“Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure . . . BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART” (1 Jn. 3:3; Matt. 5:8).

As Beloved Children

"Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption" (Eph. 4:30).

Our New Testament reading this morning (Ephesians 5 and 6) brings before us two chapters of great beauty and practical power. No words of men can approach the power of these words. Our wisdom lies in centering our minds continually upon them, endeavoring to extract a maximum of their spiritual value.

"Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children" (verse 1).

Literally, *"Become"*—a stronger word than just *"Be,"* indicating a process and an accomplishment.

"Be ye therefore"—this turns our attention to something preceding, and we look back to the end of chapter 4, beginning at verse 30—

"Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption."

What greater incentive could there be to love and holiness? *"Do not cause sorrow or grief to the One Who has manifested so much love to you."* Consider the infinite graciousness of God's condescension, that the Almighty Lord of heaven and earth, has, by loving us, made it possible for us to grieve Him!

"Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, (that is, loud, angry words) and evil speaking, be put away from you" (Eph. 4:31).

All these things grieve the Holy Spirit of God. *"Evil speaking"* is anything that we say about others that is not in the true spirit of the love that covers a multitude of sins. Straightforward things must be said when Truth is at stake, but how careful we must be that the *Spirit*, not the *flesh*, motivates them!

"And be ye kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (verse 32).

There is not much virtue in forgiveness when one comes to us humbly repentant. Forgiveness is then a comparatively easy and pleasant operation. But Jesus said, while they crucified him, *"Father, forgive them,"* and Stephen followed his example.

And while we were yet sinners he died for us to make manifest the power of a love that could lift us out of our sins. Forgiveness to mean anything, must be, as Jesus says, freely from the heart; grudgingly given as a duty, it means nothing.

"Be ye therefore followers of God" (Eph. 5:1).

The word for followers means "imitators," as the Diaglott and Revised Version give it. *Pattern yourself after God*—the greatest achievement man can strive for, for God is love and holiness, hating evil, but infinitely patient and understanding and slow to anger, rejoicing in mercy and forgiveness.

". . . as dear children" (v. 1).

"Dear" should rather be "beloved" again as in Diaglott and Revised Version. Love is the power, and the motive, and the reason for everything. Children must be beloved, or they cannot grow up to be lovable. Love is not just food and raiment, but warmth, sympathy and the closeness of heart to heart. God's children are beloved children. Because they *know* He loves them, they see love even in His wise and necessary chastisement.

"And walk in love" (v. 2).

This sums up all the teaching that follows in both chapters, in fact, *all* teaching, "*All the law and prophets*" are comprehended in this. This cannot be too strongly, or too often, emphasized. So much of ecclesial trouble, and of all trouble, is a direct result of failure in this.

"Love seeketh not her own."

Without love, all else is vain, all else is hypocrisy. Irritation, impatience, bitterness, harshness, self-pleasing, are *not* love, and such things shall not inherit the Kingdom of God. "*Walk in love.*" We ourselves are our own greatest problem.

"But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you" (v. 3).

Have we not often noticed the significant association of "*Covetousness*" with these *other evil things*? In these days of abundance and infinite variety of desirable things, covetousness is a basic problem to those in whom the Spirit is striving against the flesh, though covetousness can equally be manifested in connection with the simplest of objects and activities.

Paul says that covetousness, the desire to have things, is idolatry. The Spirit's instructions are—

"Having food and raiment, therewith BE CONTENT"
(1 Tim. 6:8).

Anything desired beyond this, except strictly and sincerely for spiritual purposes, is covetousness or idolatry. God is the all-sufficient desire and portion of the true saint, and any desire outside of God is to that extent an indication of imperfect love and incomplete spiritual satisfaction.

Verse 4 tells us that *foolish talking and jesting* are utterly out of place and unbecoming in those who claim the holy and exalted position of children of God.

Here we all stand condemned. Here is one of the childish and juvenile things among the hardest to put away when we aspire to be mature and spiritually-minded men.

The perfect pattern of a Christlike life is too beautiful and gracious to be cheapened by foolishness. Humor is the world's poor, thin substitute for the deep happiness and joy of the Spirit. Let us strive to say nothing we would not say in the presence of Christ, remembering that—

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

And Solomon testifies similarly in solemn warning—

“The thought of foolishness is sin” (Prov. 24:9).

“Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour: so doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom and honour” (Ecc. 10:1).

A few foolish words can make all our preaching seem like hypocrisy and destroy all the good we have tried to do among men in manifesting the joyful beauty of a holy life in Christ.

“Let no man deceive you with vain words, for because of these things—including foolishness and coveting—cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience” (Eph. 5:6).

“Let no man deceive you”—do not be deceived by any who belittle the seriousness and importance of these things. The way is narrow, and few find it. It will only be those who *tremble at God's Word* and take it all in utmost seriousness. Light, foolish talk and desire for earthly things are incompatible with spiritual mindedness.

“For ye WERE darkness, but NOW are ye light in the Lord” (v. 8).

From here to verse 15 the apostle speaks of light and darkness. Darkness is the natural state—the state of all the world. Light is the wisdom to realize that the natural way of the world, though appealing to the flesh, is darkness, and can end only in darkness. *All natural thought is darkness*—God's Word alone is light. A full realization of this is the finding of life.

“Let your light shine,” said Jesus—quietly, gently, but brightly and consistently—let your Christlike character and conduct be your witness and your preaching of Christ to the world.

“Walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (vs. 15, 16).

The world walks as fools, foolishly drifting away the time with their merriment and covetousness till death swallows them at last. This state of affairs is the evilness of the days. But the saints of God realize the preciousness of every passing hour as the brief time of opportunity to lay hold on wisdom and life.

"Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of God is" (v. 17).

Don't be unwise by accepting the world's general view of things, or what you yourself naturally think, but be anxious above all things to know and obey the will of God in everything.

"Be not drunk with wine, but be FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT" (v. 18).

Does this seem a strange comparison? A little meditation will manifest its fittingness. Wine has an exhilarating effect on the mind, giving a sense of well-being. It is typical of all the world's false and passing excitements.

"But be filled with the Spirit." The Spirit is to wine as the true is to the false. It gives an eternal reality of what men vainly seek in wine. It, too, has an exhilarating effect and gives a sense of well-being and comfort, but this time it is not false and transitory, but deep and true and everlasting.

"Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (v. 19).

—not only *among* yourselves, but *within* your own selves—

"... singing and making melody IN YOUR HEART to the Lord."

What a joyful and delightful and desirable character is portrayed! No anxiety, no self-pity, no childishly hurt feelings *which are just the flesh's wounded vanity*, no dissatisfaction with present circumstances *which is ingratitude* to God, no disquieting desire, *which is idolatry*; but relaxed, contented, joyful, thankful singing in the heart to God—perpetual sunshine within, regardless of what is without.

"Giving thanks ALWAYS for ALL things" (v. 20).

Here is the perfect antidote for all the evils that trouble the mind. The true children of God are always so intensely and continually thankful that all that is unpleasant and unlovely is crowded out of their minds.

"Submitting one to another in the fear of God" (v. 21).

This is very important in our relationship in the Truth. It will naturally follow the development of a contented mind. The one who has accomplished contentedness is ready to contribute to general harmony and the well-being of others. There will be no

self-assertion, no desires demanding attention and satisfaction—but a gentle, Christlike yielding and serving and pleasing of others. Jesus said, “I am among you as one that serveth” (Lk. 22:27).

* * *

From this point well into the following chapter, the apostle applies these divine principles to specific circumstances.

The first, occupying the remainder of this chapter, is the relationship of husbands and wives. It is a relationship of love, just as all relationships must be.

He states first, in two verses, that the wife must be subject to the husband in everything. Wisdom and harmony require that there be a recognized head and authority on whom the responsibility before God for all family decisions and arrangements rests. Any deviation from the divine standard is confusion.

But then in nine verses, he speaks of the height and breadth of the love that is necessary to bring to fruition the fulness of the divinely-intended pattern from the beginning, as the beautiful type of the eternal, perfect union of Christ and his Bride.

Christ first, by the power of God, perfected himself, in the doing of which he laid down his life for his Bride. And now he ever liveth to make loving intercession for her—

“Christ also loved the Ecclesia—the Called-Out—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” (vs. 25-27).

Has he the power to do it? Can he accomplish this in those who wholly and unreservedly cast themselves upon him? Who dares to deny it—blindly measuring themselves by themselves and setting limits to the power of God?

“Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands in everything . . . This is a great mystery . . . I speak concerning Christ and the Ecclesia.”

Are we part of the operation of this glorious divine mystery? To whom does the apostle address himself next?

“CHILDREN, obey your parents” (Eph. 6:1).

This is one of the very few places in Scriptures addressed directly and specifically to children. It is very important. It is the one great thing that children have to be concerned with in pleasing God.

Parents will not always be perfectly just and right, for they too have much to learn, but that is not the children's concern—their command and duty is clear, if they desire to please God and be blessed by Him, and be used and useful in His purpose. The full command is—

“Children, obey your parents IN THE LORD.”

The obedience must be for, because of, and in harmony with the Lord. This is the great reason and motive of obedience. Parents will vary, just as masters will vary, but the one must be obeyed, and the other served faithfully, as unto the Lord. Obedience to parents is obedience to God, and disobedience to parents is disobedience to God.

Here again is the divine provision for family harmony and any violation of it creates serious responsibility for all the evils that may follow.

The command does not cease when the child ceases to be dependent upon the parent. It becomes even stronger in later years as the child reaches developed maturity. Then it becomes—

“Honour thy father and mother” (v. 2)

—a guiding principle through life. All God's arrangements are beautiful; all violations of them are ugly and self-destructive.

“And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath”
(verse 4).

What does the apostle mean? Why does he *begin with* and *emphasize* an aspect we might think very minor and negative?

“Provoke not your children to wrath.”

This command is worthy of much meditation. It warns of a danger that can destroy all good efforts, and one that only true divine love can protect against. In giving the same command to the Colossians, he adds—

“. . . lest they be discouraged” (3:21).

It does not mean that there should not be strict discipline for fear of arousing anger. The Scriptures are very clear on the necessity of that. In fact, the necessity of strict discipline is what makes this command so essential.

The parent is in the position of the strong having complete control over the weak. The bully is latent in us all, ingrained in our fleshly natures. There are a thousand subtle ways in which a parent can provoke a child to wrath, agitating and arousing the natural evil of the flesh, often with great and pompous self-righteousness, and the parent can always save face by taking refuge behind his divinely-given authority.

The child has no recourse except to impotent, inward turmoil against sarcasm, and oppression, and impatience, and foolish teasing, and habitual unjustified harshness in giving instructions, and passing whims and passions of the flesh, and a discouraging attitude of petty fault finding and antagonism.

“Provoke not your children to wrath lest they be discouraged.”

There *must* be a basic foundation of gentle love, manifest even in correction. We cannot teach what we do not practice. Teaching is by example, and a bad, fleshly example is much more quickly imitated than a good one, that is the natural trend of the flesh. We cannot *teach* gentleness without consistently *manifesting* gentleness. Whatsoever is not done in godly love and patience is evil, and out of evil will come evil.

“Bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4).

“Nurture and admonition” means *“chastening and instruction,”* as the Revised Version has it. Here again, it is *“of the Lord”*, *“in the Lord.”* Everything must be done in the Spirit, and according to the instruction, of the Lord—within the circle of the Lord’s blessing and superintendence—in *God’s way*—or all will fail.

Verses 5 to 8 concern servants—our daily work—our relationship to our employers. No brother of Christ is a slack, or careless, or disinterested workman, whatever he may be doing. Christ’s brethren are only those who do the will of his Father, and his Father’s expressed will is that everything be done heartily and cheerfully, with singleness of heart, as if each task is done for God Himself. And work so done, whatever it may be, will be so accepted by God as service to Him.

Brethren of Christ must be constantly on guard against drifting into the world’s evil way of serving as little as possible, afraid of giving more than enforced minimum, always seeking more payment for less labor. This is an evil, selfish, grasping manifestation of the flesh that brethren will have no part of.

Verse 9 concerns those who in any way have oversight over others. Such are instructed to apply the same principles, to be more anxious to give abundant measure than to take. This is not the way the world’s industry is run, and a brother of Christ will often find himself very much out of place.

“Finally, my brethren, be strong IN THE LORD, and in the power of his might” (v. 10).

(Always, and in everything, *“in the Lord”*). Jesus said to Paul—*“My strength is made perfect in weakness”* (2 Cor. 12:9).

And Paul, in response, recognizing the principle, said—

"When I am weak, then am I strong" (v. 10).

It is a contrast and a comparison between natural and spiritual strength. To the world, Christ's brethren are weak. Instead of being strong and self-assertive they are mild and yielding and submissive to evil. But the brave strength of the flesh is but a passing and impotent shadow—the foolish puffing up of a toad in a pond. The worms of the grave soon conquer the mightiest among men. We must seek a more substantial strength and satisfaction than that.

"Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of HIS might"
(Eph. 6:10).

How can *we* be strong in the power of God's might? Do these words have any real meaning? If they have any meaning at all, then surely they refer to something very marvelous and unearthly. Paul fervently prayed, earlier in the epistle, that God would grant them—

"... according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might BY HIS SPIRIT in the inner man" (Eph. 3:16).

—and that they may be—

"... FILLED with all the fulness of God" (3:19).

And he speaks of God being—

"... able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us" (3:20).

Surely there is a glorious reality to these things that we must strive to attain unto—even the things of the Spirit of God which are foolishness to the natural man—the transforming power that can overcome the evil motions and reactions of the flesh and perfect characters of beauty and holiness in the fear of God.

"Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (6:11).

Paul continues his comparison between the strength of the flesh and of the Spirit. He says further—

"For we wrestle not against flesh and blood..." (v. 12).

Paul's fight was not against *people*, and neither is ours. We are sometimes apt to forget this and slip into the world's way of antagonism and belligerence against people.

"... but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (v. 12).

What are these "*principalities and powers*?" The word translated "*principality*": is *archee*, commonly rendered "*beginning*," "*old*," "*chief or ruler*," throughout the New Testament.

Here it means "*leadership—rulership—control—dominion*." The word for "*powers*" is not the Greek for power as strength, but the word meaning authority. What then is the headship and authority against which Paul fought?

We know it was not the political powers of the world, for he testified that such governments, though evil, were ordained by God for the present for general order among men, and he commanded submission and obedience to them.

When Jesus appears to Paul on the way to Damascus, he said he purposed to send Paul to the Gentiles—

“. . . to open their eyes, and to turn them from DARKNESS to LIGHT, and from the power (authority—same word) of Satan unto God” (Acts 26:18).

And Paul told the Roman brethren that they *had been* the servants, or slaves of Sin, but that they were *now* servants of God and of holiness. It was *this* kingdom, rulership, dominion, authority, of Sin against which Paul fought. This Kingdom of Sin is personified and corporealized in the Kingdom of Men as such that Paul fought. He went deeper than any outward manifestations to the basic individual elements of fleshly motives and conduct.

“I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into CAPTIVITY to the law of sin” (Rom. 7:23).

That was the arena of Paul's warfare—the battle for, and within, each mind and heart. He is very clear in Ephesians—

“In time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to THE PRINCE OF THE POWER OF THE AIR, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.

“Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in FULFILLING THE DESIRES OF THE FLESH AND OF THE MIND” (2:2, 3).

What then was the "*spiritual wickedness in high* (or heavenly) *places*" of which he speaks at the end of Ephesians 6:12?

The Pharisees are surely the best illustration of that, and Jesus' encounters with them well illustrate the warfare of which Paul speaks. They sat in Moses' seat—in "*heavenly places*"—they even controlled the High Priesthood and the House of God and the worship He had established.

Among the ecclesias the same things soon became manifest, and we see the result in the ecclesiastical institutions of today. It is an ever-present danger and requires a perpetual warfare—the mind of the flesh exalted and ruling in the very Temple of God. All the things he warns them of in these two chapters illustrate the same warfare against Sin's principalities and powers, for *its seeds are in every heart*.

"Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God"
(Eph. 6:13).

We notice that the armor is *"of God"*—from God—for it is only in the power of *His* might that we can be strong—

"That ye may be able to withstand in the evil day"
(verse 13).

Let us never presume on our ability to stand. The Spirit warns:

"Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12).

Without the whole armor of God we have no hope of success, but are like soldiers going to battle lacking essential equipment.

". . . and having done all, to stand" (v. 13),

—having accomplished the warfare—when it is all over—when the last enemy is destroyed—to be found among those who are found still standing alive on the battlefield, and to join in singing together the glorious victory song of Moses and the Lamb.

Verses 14 to 17 particularize the whole armor of God—the belt, or girdle, or binding together of Truth; the protective breastplate or heart-covering of *Righteousness* (not self-accomplished, but *"it is God that worketh in you"* and *"we are His workmanship, created unto good works"*), feet shod with the *"preparation"*—the preparedness—the eager, enthusiastic readiness to serve the Gospel of Peace—*"How beautiful are the swiftly running feet of him that bringeth good tidings of peace!"*

"Above all," the shield of Faith—belief, confidence, assurance—the unassailable conviction that God is, and that He *will* unfailingly reward all who diligently seek Him with all their heart. This shield will defend against every attack, every assault of the enemy—all his inflammatory darts of temptation and evil desire—all his shafts of discouragement and doubt.

And take Salvation for your helmet, or more fully, as in First Thessalonians 5:8 —*"for an helmet the Hope of Salvation."* Why a helmet and a breastplate, if the Shield of Faith is all-sufficient protection? Because *"Faith without Works is dead."*

The head must be enclosed by the hope that Paul says comes by a tested steadfastness, and the heart must be covered by the righteousness that comes of God.

And finally, the Sword of the Spirit, which is the *Word of God*. That is the weapon against all the rulership and authority and dominion of evil, both within and without. The Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, the one and only weapon of offence—sharper and more piercing than any literal sword—searching and dividing between soul and spirit—between that which is fleshly and that which is of the Spirit. Only the Word can discern, and teach us to discern, our own hearts and motives.

He has mentioned six elements of the armor of God. What is the seventh? That he describes in verses 18, 19—*Prayer*.

“Praying always with all prayer and supplication IN THE SPIRIT, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints” (v. 18).

Another version puts the thought perhaps a little clearer—*“Use every kind of prayer and entreaty, and at every opportunity pray in the Spirit. BE ON THE ALERT about it; devote yourself constantly to prayer for all God’s people.”*

It is those who bring their lives to this state of devotion who will stand approved before Christ. There must be an urgency and intensesness about our supplications—a great consciousness of inadequacy and shortcoming and spiritual need.

“Fear and trembling” is the required frame of mind, as specified in verse 5. The slightest tendency to complacency, or to relax our efforts, or take salvation for granted while we please ourselves from day to day, is fatal. There must be a constant pleading—a constant sense of abasement and unworthiness—*never of despair*, but always of earnest entreaty. The Great Example was preeminently a man of constant, fervent prayer—

“. . . offering up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him Who was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared” (Heb. 5:7).

* * *

“And for me, that utterance may be given me that I may open my mouth boldly . . . as I ought to speak” (6:19, 20).

Even Paul’s preaching was not something to be taken for granted, great and especially appointed apostle to the Gentiles though he was. Even Paul felt the need of their prayers, that he might have the courage to carry on his ministry to the end. Paul, too, was just a man like us, of our own same weak flesh

and blood. Weariness, and labor, and pain, and ridicule, were just as real and hard for him as for us.

"To make known the mystery of the Gospel, for which I am an ambassador in bonds" (literally, "in chains," as R.V.) (Eph. 6:19, 20).

An ambassador in chains! The great God of heaven had graciously sent an ambassador to men, fully verified by divine credentials, and they had put him in chains! Had we forgotten that Paul was writing all these beautiful things from the confinement of a prison cell?

Paul could have been very bitter about his unjust detention and about not being able to be where he wanted to be. He could have depressed all around him by his childish moping and ungraciousness. But rather in all things he gave thanks and was not only content, but intensely *joyful*, accepting the will of the Lord as best and doing all he could to spread the sunshine of his contentment and joy.

He concludes with his usual gracious salutation—peace, and love, and grace to all who love our Lord Jesus in sincerity.

"Sincerity" here is literally "*incorruptness*." He is speaking of the unchanging, spiritual, and enduring love that united Christ and his brethren—

"Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ with an imperishable and unconquerable love."

Epistle to the Ephesians

The Epistle to the Ephesians is a general epistle in the sense that it does not deal with any specific problems, but with the *deep principles* of the Truth. It has no special greetings to, or even reference to, any individuals, as would be expected in an epistle to one ecclesia, especially where Paul had but recently spent three years, as he had at Ephesus.

It gives the appearance of being intended, not just for Ephesus, but for the brethren and sisters of all the ecclesias of Western Asia Minor of which Ephesus was the centre and hub—the same group of ecclesias to whom John wrote from Patmos.

In the first two chapters, Paul describes the eternal purpose of God to unite in one perfect, harmonious, unblemished (that's the point), spiritual whole, all things in Christ.

The epistle is addressed (v. 1) to the *saints* (holy ones) and the *faithful*—not two classes of course, but two essential characteristics: those who are holy and are full of faith. Both are essential: either alone would be sterile, actually impossible.

The epistle is addressed to none other than these, except in the sense of exhorting all others to make themselves holy and full of faith. It is our wisdom to be sure we know what God means and expects as to holiness and fullness of faith, and to be sure that we—to the best of our ability—constantly and continuously labour to be in that very limited class—holy and without blemish.

Holiness is total sanctification unto God and separation from the things of the flesh—the passing meaningless, animal things of the natural world. And we are told that—

“without holiness, no man shall see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14).

Holiness and fullness of faith are a total, every moment way of life, way of thinking and speaking and acting—*totally* different from the ordinary way of the world. They are total, absorbing, exclusive interest in God and in divine things.

Verse 2: *“Grace and peace from God, and the Lord Jesus Christ.”*

This is not, as some make it, just a technical, formal opening salutation to a letter, like *“Dear Sir.”* It is a reference to the very heart of the divine purpose itself.

Paul uses the word *“grace”* twelve times in this epistle—three times in each of the first three chapters. *“Grace”* is God's divine

favor and benevolence toward us—the means and the secret of our salvation. It is far above and beyond mere justice. It is even above and beyond mere mercy. It is active, all powerful, all-transforming, redeeming compassionate love and blessing.

“And peace”—The peace of God—perfect peace—is that essential state of mind to which we can and must attain by laying hold upon the freely offered grace of God.

Verse 3: *“Blessed be God.”*

To those who have the least conception at all of the depth and stupendous magnitude and glory of these things, that can be the only and the irresistible reaction. And not just once, nor even just periodically, but constantly, all day long. *“Blessed be God.”* If this is not our total and continuous frame of mind in all our waking moments, then we have just not made real contact with the glory and greatness and goodness of God at all.

Verse 3: *“Who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings . . .”*

“Blessed be God . . . who hath blessed us.” Our blessing of God is, of course, a totally different thing from His blessing of us and the words in the original are different: *“Eulogetos”* —is always applied in the New Testament to God, and *“Eulogeo”*, applied to His blessing of men. But they are very closely related, and English has no better than *“bless”* for both of them. The former carries the idea of praise and worship, the latter more that of poured-out goodness.

Verse 3: *“with all spiritual blessings.”*

The original is even stronger, *“with every spiritual blessing”* (as R.V.).

God has held absolutely nothing back of all the spiritual blessings He could possibly give us. We may think, in some of our circumstances and abilities, He could have done differently and better—but that is not wisdom.

He has done the *very best* and most possible for us spiritually. If we do not lay hold on it all in its infinite fullness, that is our fault and our loss. To lay hold on it, to possess it and absorb it, is a full time, full-hearted, full-devoted thing.

Verse 3: *“In the heavenlies.”* The word *“places”* is not in the original. It could be heavenly things. It appears to mean, more abstractly, heavenly realm or sphere—that is, spiritual relations as against natural relations.

It is used five times in this epistle; twice (as it is used here) of the present blessed state of the believer; once of Christ, as

and where he is at present; and twice of the spiritual powers of the present world—those who hold religious authority and rule. In the last use (6:12) Paul speaks of spiritual wickedness in the heavenlies against which the soldier of Christ must do battle.

Verse 3: *“In the heavenlies in Christ.”*

The whole plan is *in Christ*. All centers in him. He is the means by which God is destroying all evil and bringing the whole creation into eternal harmony and glory. Only *“in him”*—inside of him, totally absorbed into and covered *by* him, can we have any *Hope or Life or Peace or Joy*.

Verse 4: *“According as He (God) hath chosen us in him (Christ).”*

Paul deals here, and in the next verse, with Election and Predestination. It is vital to our salvation that we understand what these are, and how they apply to us.

“Election” is simply *“choice”* and to elect is simply to choose; and the word is usually so translated. Our word election is from the Greek word for choose, and it’s simpler if we drop the words elect and election and stick to choose, which is plain and clear.

“Pre-destinate”—as in verse 5, is simply that: pre-destinate, to decide the destiny beforehand, and we have no better word for the idea and that’s the literal meaning of the original. God, *by His foreknowledge*, (and that’s the point), chooses men and predestinates them. Paul is speaking, all through this epistle, only of those who will be the final redeemed.

He keeps two things clear and we must keep them clear. First, God is no respecter of persons. He chooses men to salvation upon the basis of what He knows they will do. We are told in the Old Testament that—

“The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth to show Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him” (2 Chr. 16:9—the prophet Hanani).

And Christ says the same—

John 4:23—*“The Father seeketh such to worship Him,”* that is, He is hunting for them. The problem is not discrimination by God; the problem is trying to find enough individuals in the vast heap of human flesh who will give their lives totally to God without reserve. That’s whom He is seeking so hard to find.

The second point is that whether or not we are ultimately part of this choice and predestination *depends upon what we do*. It’s up to us.

Paul speaks throughout this chapter of the ideal Body, the ultimate redeemed. It may sound to some like it's a cut-and-dried affair, arbitrarily determined by God; that is, that He predestinated before the world began, so it is immutably set, regardless of what man may or can do. But He predestinated on the basis of His foreknowledge of the course that we would choose and His predestination had no influence upon that choice. In His foreknowledge our own choice comes first and then His predestination, based upon that choice.

Some may not be able to understand this—though it should not present any problem to the reasonable mind. But whether we understand it or not, we must accept it as a fundamental divinely attested fact. (There's nothing cut and dried). Peter warns us to—

"give diligence to make our calling and election (choice) sure" (2 Pet. 1:10);

and he tells us how to do so; by abounding in certain virtues; knowledge, patience, godliness, etc.; not just having them, but *abounding* in them. And Paul tells us to work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12).

The whole thrust of Scripture—all its instruction and exhortation and solemn warning is to the effect that it's up to us, and it requires total effort. The Scriptures are full of such expressions as "*Let not slip*", "*keep in mind*", "*always abound*", "*overcome*", "*endure to the end*", "*patient continuance*", and many more. Some say, "*it is already predestinated, then nothing I do can make a difference.*" *That's utter blind stupidity or deliberate wickedness.*

Though the Redeemed have from the beginning of the world been chosen and predestinated, it is entirely on the basis of God's foreknowledge of the total effort they will make and the total devotion they will show. None of this is to say that they earn or even merit eternal salvation. Salvation is wholly a free gift of God's grace. But the effort and devotion *will* determine to whom the free grace is shown.

"God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him" (Acts 10:34, 35).

If we don't work righteousness to the limit of our ability, we shall *not* be accepted—we shall *not* receive the grace.

Verse 4: "*Hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world.*"

The "us" cannot be pressed to prove either Paul or his readers had guaranteed, irreversible salvation. He is speaking ideally of those who will prove faithful to the end. It is he that endureth to the end that shall be saved. And though a man may be "in Christ", if he does not "abide in him" he is "cast out and burned".

Note in passing that if to be chosen before the foundation of the world indicates pre-existence for Christ, it equally indicates pre-existence for all the redeemed, which few, if any, would claim.

Verse 4: "That we should be holy and without blame—more correctly—without blemish (as R.V.) before Him in Love."

This is the central and key fact of the epistle—yea of the whole plan of salvation.

"That we should be holy and without blemish."

Paul comes back to these central and basic fundamentals in chapter 5, speaking of the Bride of Christ, the Ecclesia—

"That he (Christ) might sanctify and cleanse it (the ecclesia) 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" (vs. 26, 27).

We note that this making holy and without blemish is done "by the Word", so it is clearly something that has to occur and be accomplished at the present time by diligent, prayerful, continuous study of the Word—always of course, seeking the essential help and guidance and power of God through Christ.

We must ourselves do it, but still it must be—and must be recognized as being—the work of God. Can we, in this weak, mortal flesh, achieve holiness and unblemishedness? We not only can but we *must*. Does that mean that we must achieve permanent perfection? That is obviously impossible. The flesh could not achieve that for one day, let alone a lifetime; for it means not only not doing any wrong, but—which is much more important—doing everything right, total service, not wasting a moment of God-given time, not forgetting God for a moment.

What is required is that we follow a course that keeps us in God's sight, holy and without blemish. What then is that required course to be followed in order to achieve salvation?

Primarily, we must have—we ourselves must provide—(always of course with God's help) three things—

1. A goal of perfection.
2. Total *desire* for perfection.
3. Total *effort* toward perfection.

If we do not have the goal, obviously we are hopeless. God is not going to force a blessing upon us that we do not even perceive as necessary. And if the glorious prospect that God has laid before us, and the marvelous love that He has manifested to us in calling us to the light, and offering us the blessing of His power and guidance, offering us eternity in the joy of fellowship with Him, and limitless spiritual vitality forever—if this does not create a total reciprocal devotion and desire, then we are dead indeed.

And if such a desire does not automatically translate into total absorption and dedication and effort to achieve the desire—if there isn't sufficient wisdom and intelligence to cause us to strain every nerve and sinew to make sure we do not let slip from us such great salvation—then what good would such dull, apathetic creatures be to God?

The present life, at best, is less than one hundred years. But after a billion times a billion years, *eternity* hasn't even begun to begin. Who but a fool would jeopardize the one for anything in the other?

So we must come to God with the goal, the desire, and the devotion of total effort. In baptism, we are washed perfectly clean. We rise from its waters "*holy and without blemish before Him in love*" (1:4). How do we maintain that essential perfection? He has lovingly provided a way—study, learning, meditation, self-examination, steady striving to overcome every aspect of the flesh, fixed determination to work to the limit for God in the joyful thanksgiving of grateful love, confession and repentance, prayer and supplication and, above all, constant washing out, re-purifying by faith in the all-cleansing blood of the Lamb.

We must constantly, repeatedly, keep purifying our heart before God. We must keep ourselves—by the merciful provision of cleansing—*holy and without blemish before Him in love*. It must be a continuous process, all day and every day.

Our strong desire for the love and fellowship of God must give us a strong desire for holiness.

There have been, and are, those who are thus holy and without blemish before Him in love. Only God knows who they are, for only He knows the hearts, and He alone can measure the labors against the abilities and the overcoming against the degree of testing.

They may be few and rare, but the number will at last be made up, after all the travail of the ages—which is for their sakes alone.

Verse 5: *"Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will."*

All mankind are, as Paul says, in a natural sense *"His offspring."* He is already the Father of all. But this adoption is much higher. This is for those who with all their hearts aspire to His beauty of holiness and hate in themselves any falling short of that holiness; those who seek his spiritual likeness.

Verse 6: *"To the praise of the glory of His grace."*

He does all this that His grace—His manifested love and kindness, should be glorified that we ourselves should consciously praise and glorify it, and that we in our lives and conduct should bring glory to it.

We must always remember that *our whole purpose in life is to bring glory to God*; to manifest to men the purifying and transforming power of the grace He has extended to us. In all we do, public and private, we must be living advertisements of His holiness, or He will have to cast us aside, and disavow any relationship to us.

Verse 6: *"Wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved."*

The Beloved, of course, is Christ. All is in him. We must never lose sight of him as the God-appointed covering making us acceptable; but never as just ritually or imputedly. It is only as our heart and labors and desires are purified by faith and love.

Verses 7 and 8: *"In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace wherein He hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence."*

Riches, abounded, all wisdom—These are the thoughts we must keep in mind constantly. First, we have been forgiven. Jesus taught that, *"he to whom most is forgiven will love the most"* (Lk. 7:43).

We must realize the extent of our forgiveness, and of our need for forgiveness. And we increasingly so realize this by dwelling our minds on the infinite purity and beauty of God's holiness, and the natural ugliness of our flesh.

The natural man is quite satisfied with himself. He sees nothing wrong, no ugliness, no loathesome disease with himself. But Paul says in chapter 2, he is *"dead in trespasses and sins"* (v. 1), *"fulfilling the lusts of the flesh and the mind"* (v. 3), *"children of wrath"* (v. 3)—and chapter 4—

"Alienated through ignorance" (verse 18).

We must realize that our natural way, our natural thinking is an abomination to God. We must *learn* His way and His thinking.

After a full realization of the depth of our forgiveness, consider Paul's subsequent words—

"The riches of His grace, wherein He hath abounded to us in all wisdom and prudence" (Eph. 1:7-8).

This is the Almighty Creator of this infinite universe condescending to the passing vapour of the worm called man, riches, grace, abounding in all wisdom and prudence.

When anyone does us a kindness, we feel, or should feel, a sense of obligation, not a legal obligation, but an obligation of affection. This is what the Almighty God is striving to create and awake in puny man so that man will be driven to lift himself spiritually to God in love.

"All wisdom and prudence"—that is, the understanding itself (wisdom) and the beneficial application of that understanding (prudence). Most of us, by our actions, write ourselves off as ignorant and content to stay ignorant. But the Word of God is a vast and inexhaustible treasure of knowledge, and God has offered us all wisdom to increasingly reap these treasures. He will not be pleased, He will not see His likeness growing in us, if we do not take—if we are not intensely anxious to take—full advantage of that wisdom to the limit of our time and opportunity. If our mind is on earthly things, it will forever remain earthly and *perish* as such.

"To be carnally minded is death." (Rom. 8:6).

"Having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself. That in the dispensation of the fullness of times, He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth, even in Him" (Eph. 1:9, 10).

This is the glorious, eternal, Divine Purpose which He has, in incomprehensible condescension, revealed unto us. The essential characteristic of this final eternal result is that it be *"holy and without blemish in love."*

Those who have chosen this—given their *whole* heart and strength and mind and desire to this, will be those who remain in those glorious and endless ages, when all who have chosen anything less will have been swept forever away.

I Do Rejoice, Yea, and Will Rejoice!

*"Rejoice in the Lord ALWAYS: and AGAIN
I say, Rejoice!" (Phil. 4:4).*

This is the most intimate and personal of Paul's ecclesial epistles. The ecclesia at Philippi was the first established by Paul in Europe—in response to the vision of the Man of Macedonia. It was there that Paul went on the sabbath day to the place of prayer by the riverside, and found Lydia, whose heart the Lord touched. This was the beginning of the Philippian ecclesia, which held such a prominent place in the apostle's affections.

The spirit of the epistle to the Philippians is joy, contentment, fraternal affection, and holiness. Its background is loneliness, imprisonment, and the hovering shadow of condemnation and a cruel death, but its keynote is peace and rejoicing. *"I do rejoice, and WILL rejoice!"* the apostle triumphantly exclaims (1:18); and to them he writes—

"Rejoice in the Lord ALWAYS: and AGAIN I say, REJOICE!" (4:4).

Our minds turn again to that unforgettable scene at midnight in this same city of Philippi years before (Acts 16:23-25)—

"And when they had laid MANY STRIPES upon them, they CAST them into prison . . . THRUST them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks . . . And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and SANG PRAISES UNTO GOD."

What glorious secret was it that these men had? Surely no circumstance could be more physically and mentally miserable and depressing—cast roughly into an inner dungeon to be reserved for more abuse on the morrow—distressingly fastened by the feet in stocks, and racked with the pain of the *"many stripes"* they had unjustly received.

But they *"sang praises unto God."* WHAT for? This epistle gives the answer—

"Be careful for nothing"—let nothing depress you—"but in everything by prayer and supplication WITH THANKS-GIVING let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, SHALL keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (4:6-7).

Nothing could dim or obscure for Paul the ever-present and overwhelming ecstasy of the love of Christ. He gloried in trib-

ulation (Rom. 5:3), for the bitterest of tribulation only impressed him more intensely with the all-sufficiency of the consolation of Christ—

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? NAY! In all these things we are MORE THAN CONQUERORS through him that loved us!” (Rom. 8:35-37).

All these things were everyday experiences with Paul, and he gloried when they flooded down upon him, for each visitation but thrillingly revealed anew their utter powerlessness to pierce the all-protecting armor of the love of Christ in his heart.

“I thank my God upon every remembrance of you,” he tells them as he begins his letter (1:3). That must be *our* feeling concerning all our brethren and sisters who are striving toward the mark of the perfection of Christ. Our minds, like Paul’s, must be constantly filled with loving thoughts and thankful prayers concerning them.

Verse 4: *“Always making request WITH JOY.”*

This is an unusual and striking expression—*“making request with joy”*—but it well illustrates the spirit of the epistle. Paul was in prison, writing to dear friends far away whom he longed achingly to see, but still there is not even a hint of any restraint upon his buoyant rejoicing. These are the circumstances in which the wisdom of the Spirit has placed him; these then are the circumstances in which God sees that he can do the most good, or receive the most benefit.

Therefore, though he earnestly desires the freedom and opportunity to enjoy their company and fellowship, he does not let the enforced separation lessen his present joy. He and they rejoice in mutual, understanding love, knowing that *“ALL THINGS work together for good to those that love God”* (Rom. 8:28), content to wait out the sorrows of the brief present in the cheerful confidence of the eternal, cloudless future.

He was confident, he said (v. 6), that God, Who had begun a good work in them, would perform it until the day of Christ. If we are watching for them, we shall find many thrilling references to this glorious Divine mystery which is expressed so boldly later in the epistle (2:13)—

“It is GOD WHICH WORKETH IN YOU, both to will and to do of HIS good pleasure.”

It is God which worketh in us—if we will let Him—if we will yield and submit, putting aside our own desires, our own plans and

hopes and ambitions, and seeking to follow the guiding light of Scripture and Providence from day to day.

"The things which have happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the Gospel" (1:12).

Paul's life was wrapped up in the furtherance of the Gospel of his beloved Master. What did bonds and imprisonment mean to him if they contributed to that end? He turned it all into a powerful and glorious advertisement for Christ (v. 13)—

"My bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places."

And the result went further still (v. 14)—

"MANY of the brethren, waxing confident in my bonds, are much more"—note the emphasis—"MUCH MORE bold to speak the Word without fear."

Thus he turned a crippling handicap into a stirring inspiration. Such is the power of a fearless example—not only of courage, but more—of *inextinguishable rejoicing*. He not only endured with patience, but in his very enduring he radiated a confidence and peace that inspired others to fearlessness and joy.

"And I therein do rejoice, yea, and WILL rejoice!" (v. 18).

Why?—

"For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ" (v. 19).

See how he binds up his salvation with the power of their prayers and Christ's indwelling Spirit. There was no self-sufficiency about Paul. *"No man liveth unto himself."* Again and again we are impressed with the mutual interdependence of the body of Christ, for so it is ordained in the love and wisdom of God.

"The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee" (1 Cor. 12:21).

Paul was humbly conscious that, in the strange and marvelous working of the Divine purpose, the prayer of the least of God's saints could have a bearing upon the issues of his salvation. What a wonderful bond of unity a perception of this truth creates!

Philippians 1:21: *"To me, to live is Christ."*

Here again Paul briefly and beautifully expresses our walk in the world—*"To me, to live is Christ."* All his life was bound up in Christ—all his activities centered in him.

Outside of Christ *there is no life*—he is the Way of Life—all else is death. How dimly we seem to perceive what was so living and vivid to Paul! *“To me, to live is Christ.”*

Verse 27: *“Stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel.”*

This epistle contains no criticism or rebuke. But if there was one thing in which Paul thought it advisable to exhort them, this would be it. The thought appears again at the beginning of chapter 2, and again beginning chapter 3, *“With one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel.”*

The brotherhood today is going through a crucial period of purging and tribulation. It *must* drive those that are left closer together—there could be no greater tragedy than to suffer the tribulation without reaping the joys and benefits that the tribulation is Divinely designed to effect. To the apostle, this was the deciding index of success or failure—of sorrow or joy. He pleads (and who could ignore such pleading)—

“If there be any consolation in Christ, if any comfort in love, if any fellowship in the Spirit—if you have any affection and sympathy—fulfil ye my joy by being of one mind, united in mutual love” (2:1-2).

What relationship is more tender and beautiful than the fellowship of the Truth? Jesus said, *“Behold, my mother and my brethren!”* But it requires much patience and gentle understanding—

“Let each esteem other better than themselves” (v. 3).

Paul advances this as the basis of mutual love and communion and forbearance. The worth of any individual in the sight of God depends upon his *degree of overcoming*. *“Where much is given, much is expected”* (Lk. 12:48). We cannot judge. Our own record may prove to be the poorest when abilities and opportunities are in the last Great Day weighed against accomplishments. How can we evaluate the efforts and struggles of others? Only God can gauge the bitterness and stress of each heart's secret conflicts.

Paul, in his pleading, but expresses the mind of Christ. *“Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God”* (Eph. 4:30) is still the most touching and powerful of entreaties. The future of the Berean fellowship may well hinge upon the degree to which we are moved by this entreaty to *enlarge our hearts one to another in the bonds of a love that suffers long and is kind*—hoping all things, bearing all things, and enduring all things.

Paul emphasizes his entreaty by the example of Christ—

"Let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus—he humbled himself, and made himself of no reputation" (Phil. 2:5-8).

Christ, the Great Example, was big enough to yield lovingly and cheerfully in everything that concerned his own desires and honor and self-gratification—always seeking peace and putting the pleasure and welfare of others before his own, realizing the utter unimportance of the present, and the immensity of the eternal issues—the *great work of God in him*.

This leads the apostle to that glorious paradox (vs. 12-13)—

"Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

For it is GOD WHICH WORKETH IN YOU, both to will and to do of His good pleasure."

"Work . . . for God worketh in you." The mighty, rushing wind of the Spirit is upon you—set your sails to catch every ounce of it, for this is your day of opportunity.

Verse 14: *"Do all things without murmurings and disputing . . . that ye may be the children of God."*

"Without murmurings and disputings." *"Forbearing one another in love"* is the thought—recognizing in others a fellowship of effort, a unity of objective—and overlooking in love the weaknesses and shortcomings which they are perhaps more conscious of, and secretly grieved by, than we are.

BUT—*there must be a sincere unity of objective*, and it can only be the objective the Scriptures hold forth—the *perfection of Christ*. Without this basic agreement there can be no hope of the fellowship of the Spirit. *That is the real issue today.*

Verse 15: *"Among whom ye shine as lights in the world."*

Here indeed our walk in the world is brought into sharp focus. Jesus said likewise—

"Ye are the light of the world" (Matt. 5:14).

The picture we are given by these words is one of a spectacular radiance in the midst of a boundless darkness. Our walk in the world must be such that men will be impressed that we are motivated by a strange, unearthly power. Jesus said—

"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples— IF YE HAVE LOVE ONE TO ANOTHER" (Jn. 13:35).

To what extent do we conform to this *essential requirement of discipleship*? Love does not plead the excuse of unloveliness in others—rather in such it finds an opportunity to demonstrate its own unselfishness and power. Paul desired this heavenly fruit in his converts that (v. 16) he might rejoice in the day of Christ that he had not run in vain, for truly unless their spir-

itual growth in Christ reaches the full ripeness of unselfish, uncomplaining love, his efforts on them had been completely wasted, as on a barren tree.

* * *

He planned (v. 19) to send Timothy to them soon, as his messenger of consolation, he said. And then comes a revealing note which, though infinitely tragic, has an aspect of comfort for us in this dark day (vs. 20, 21)—

"I have no one else to send—for all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's."

All were wrapped up in their own quite legitimate, but quite temporal, interests. How meaningless it will all seem in retrospect when the day of golden opportunity is passed, and the only reality left is the judgment seat of Christ! Can we measure our own lives and activities by this unsparing yardstick, and be content?

The comfort of the picture lies in the fact that even the apostolic times were "a day of small things." It was a very restricted and family affair. "My son Timothy . . . I have no one else to send . . ."

But still the apostle is not discouraged or cast down—

"Finally, my brethren (3:1), rejoice in the Lord."

Again he returns to his basic theme of rejoicing, which nothing can quench. The aged and forsaken prisoner is encouraging those who are younger, at liberty, and have the advantage of ecclesial companionship. But it was fitting, for he possessed in much fuller measure than they—the one real, never-failing source of joy—the vivid awareness of the power of the love of Christ.

The word translated "Finally" literally means "remainder" and the sense is, "This, then, remains . . ." He uses the same word again in chapter 4:8, "FINALLY, whatsoever things are true, etc." This word is translated "Henceforth" in the expression, "HENCEFORTH there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness" (2 Tim. 4:8). This remains, in spite of all passing sorrow—"Rejoice in the Lord"

Verse 3: "We worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh."

"Worship God, and rejoice in Christ" The closer we come to that as our fixed and habitual frame of mind, the closer we are to the mind of the Spirit, which is life and peace.

"Have no confidence in the flesh."

This is infinitely far-reaching. Jesus said—

"He that loseth his life for my sake shall find it" (Matt. 10:39).

Paul had done just that, as he goes on to say, and he had done it gladly—even eagerly.

All that had made up his former life of satisfaction and pride, he had cast aside. He saw the emptiness and falseness and unsoundness of it all. The mind of the flesh seeks self-expression and self-gratification in a thousand different, subtle ways—many of them apparently righteous, noble and good, but *pride* is at the bottom of them all. We *must* see through it. We must abhor every ugly impulse of self-assertion and self-esteem. We must empty ourselves of self, and be overwhelmed with our utter insignificance.

"What is man, that Thou, God, art mindful of him?" (Psa. 8:4)—pitiful specks of briefly animated dust in the immeasurable vastness of eternity. Who are we to even think we have a thought worth thinking?

"Worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ, and have no confidence in the flesh" (3:3).

"I count all things but dung that I may win Christ, and be found in him; that I may KNOW him, and the POWER of his resurrection, and the FELLOWSHIP of his sufferings—if by ANY MEANS I might attain!" (Phil. 3:8-11).

Surely we can but sadly smile when some speak disparagingly of "extremists" in the race for life. How pale the most extreme would appear before the intensity of the apostle's fervent strivings and desire!

"In stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft . . . beaten with rods, stoned, scourged with whips . . . weariness, painfulness, watchings, hunger, thirst, cold, nakedness . . ." (2 Cor. 11:23-27).

And yet he says (vs. 12-17)—

"I count not myself to have attained . . . I strive that if by any means I MIGHT attain . . . I PRESS toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus . . . Brethren, BE FOLLOWERS OF ME."

And then he goes on in sadness (vs. 18-19) to speak of those who walked as the enemies of the cross of Christ . . . whose end is destruction . . . whose glory is their shame . . . *who mind earthly things.*

Is it so terrible to "*mind earthly things*"? Does it call for such extreme condemnation? Houses, lawns, furniture, automobiles, business, what shall we eat? what shall we wear?—all must be attended to in their time and season—but *where is our*

heart? What fills our interests? Where does our mind naturally love to turn?—patterns, recipes, needlework, hobbies, workshops, gardens, photographs, recreation, sports? . . . or the *eternal things of God?*

“Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth” (Col. 3:2).

I count all things but loss . . . I press—I strive—I strain toward the mark . . . if by any means I might attain to the transcendent, eternal glory of oneness with Christ.

* * *

“Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed-for, my joy and my crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved” (4:1).

Does this overflowing manifestation of affection seem to us extreme and overdone? Are we, like the Corinthians, afraid to open our hearts to one another? Are we cold, and reserved, and self-contained? Peter exhorts (1 Pet. 4:8)—

“ABOVE ALL THINGS, have fervent love among yourselves.”

That will solve most problems.

There is nothing ordinary or commonplace about the glorious Gospel of Christ. It means a complete and revolutionary transformation of the heart. It is *all or nothing*.

Then once more (v. 4) comes that exultant refrain—

“Rejoice in the Lord always: and AGAIN I say, REJOICE!”

How eager and anxious he was that they should enjoy the full glory and power of their holy calling—that they should share with him the transporting joy and peace of life in Christ!

Verse 5: *“Let your moderation”*—the word really means “gentleness” and is so translated in other places—*“Let your GENTLENESS be known unto all men.”*

Christ’s true brethren will be universally known for their unfailing gentleness in all relationships and circumstances. Gentleness is the manifestation of a calm and spiritual mind—

“Be careful for nothing” (v. 6)

—let nothing make you anxious or upset—take every problem to God in thanksgiving and prayer.

“And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding (v. 7), SHALL keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

He speaks in terms of unshakable assurance. He has no doubts of the unfailing efficacy of His Divine prescription.

"Finally, my brethren, whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report—THINK ON THESE THINGS" (v. 8).

The practical wisdom of this counsel, even from a natural point of view, is surely obvious. The folly of the opposite course is surely manifest. To keep the mind occupied with thoughts of things that are lovely and pure is not only beneficial and spiritually up building—it is also self-evidently the course of peace and happiness. But, above all, the crowning promise of this way is (v. 9)—

"The God of peace shall be with you."

He finds occasion, in conclusion, to rejoice in them again (verse 10)—that their care of him in his affliction had flourished. In the intimacy of his special affection for them, he reminds them (verse 15) that when he was establishing the ecclesias, they alone of all the churches had been concerned to contribute to his daily needs. Philippi was in Macedonia. To the rich Corinthians he said—

"The deep poverty of the ecclesias of Macedonia abounded unto the riches of their liberality . . . beyond their power they were willing . . . praying us with much entreaty that we would receive the gift" (2 Cor. 8:1-4).

And later, in chapter 11, he tells the Corinthians that he had accepted nothing from *them*, relying rather on the hard-earned assistance of the Macedonian brethren. He refused the help of the rich, and accepted that of the struggling poor. He refused the help of the Corinthians, he said (2 Cor. 11:12), that he might cut off occasion from them that desired occasion—that he might not give them cause to glory that they had supported him.

How much this tells us of the confidence of his intimacy with the brethren and sisters of Philippi—that he did not hesitate to share the meager resources of their poverty with them! There were no puffing-up, pride-gratifying riches here—no danger that the well-to-do would glory over him that of their abundance they had patronizingly supported this indigent wanderer, among their various charitable hobbies. *Rich Philippians*—powerful in their poverty! *Poor Corinthians*—impotent in their opulence!

Arising out of this consideration, he beautifully reveals to them the secret of his divine peace of mind (vs. 11-12)—

"I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know

how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and suffer need."

"I have learned . . . I am instructed."

It was a state of mind that had to come by a process of learning. Jesus said: "*LEARN of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart*" (Matt. 11:29). And of the Son of God himself it is recorded, "*He LEARNED obedience by the things that he suffered*" (Heb. 5:8).

This word "*instructed*" in verse 12 means *to be initiated into divine mysteries*. It is the only place it occurs in the Scriptures.

"I can do ALL THINGS through Christ who strengtheneth me" (v. 13).

That was the glorious secret into which he had been initiated, and it must be ours. "*When I am weak, then am I strong*" (2 Cor. 12:10). When I most fully realize and am impressed with my utter helplessness, then am I most strong through the transforming power of Christ.

Verse 20: "*Unto God be glory for ever and ever.*"

This dare not be just a form of words, or an occasional remembrance. "

Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are, and were created" (Rev. 4:11).

Let us keep that before us as a continual perspective of the purpose of our life and walk in the world. Our part in the glorious, unbounded future depends upon whether our lives and characters contribute to the glory and pleasure of God.

* * *

Verse 21: "*Salute every saint in Christ Jesus.*"

Not just "*ALL saints,*" but "*EVERY saint*"—each one separately and individually. A beautiful concluding thought: "*Salute EVERY saint in Christ.*" Consider them all, over and over, one by one, in loving and prayerful remembrance, after the wonderful example of the aged apostle, that the whole body, fitly joined together according to the effectual working of every part, may grow up in Christ unto the edifying of itself in love.

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen."

Every Man Perfect In Christ Jesus

“Strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering WITH JOYFULNESS” (Col. 1:11).

Colosse was a city in western Asia Minor, the present Turkey. It was quite near the city of Laodicea and the rest of the seven ecclesias of the Revelation. No mention is made of it in Paul's travels, though it is very likely he visited there.

Paul's epistle to them was, like most of his epistles, written from prison. Paul's concern was never for himself or his own circumstances. For the Gospel's sake he gave up everything. He had no family, no home, no permanent employment. His life was a weary and continual pilgrimage.

This epistle's great theme is *the supreme position of Christ in the purpose of God*—the necessity in all things of being *with him and in him*. This basic truth is presented as a bulwark against being led aside by crochets and invented forms of self-righteousness and self-discipline which ministered to pride, and do not get to the root of the problem of *overcoming the flesh*.

It teaches that true holiness is both beautiful and practical, cleansing and purifying and ennobling every aspect of life, but that there is no value or virtue, but rather harm, in performing self-imposed regulations that God has not required.

The epistle is addressed (1:2) to the—

“SAINTS and faithful brethren in Christ at Colosse.”

Most versions render this—

“To the HOLY and faithful brethren.”

There is such a class of people. There *must be* such a class—holy and faithful—completely different from the world in all they say and do—men and women of heavenly beauty and godliness, sealed with the living seal of Christ in their character for all the world to see.

“Grace be unto you”—“*grace*” means kindness, favor, blessing, mercy, goodness. *“And peace”*—calm, relaxed tranquility, confident in the assurance that *“ALL things work together for good”*—that God never slumbers, and that nothing happens or can happen that He does not control.

“We give thanks unto God for you” (v. 3).

Paul's heart was always full of thanksgiving—thankful for the revelation of the great divine purpose—thankful that he was called to play a part in it—thankful for the holy and faithful

brethren throughout the world who had been separated from the world and were united with him in God's great purpose.

"Praying ALWAYS for you."

All men of God give much time to prayer—not just on specific occasions, but a continual attitude—a continual maintaining contact. All study of the Word and all work in the Truth should be done in the spiritual atmosphere of prayer—all should be done in the spirit of active, living communion with God.

Consider how many brethren and sisters were within the circle of Paul's attention and care! Yet he could truthfully say to *all* that he prayed *always* for them—not just general, impersonal prayers for them as a group, but loving and personal prayers for each one. We must pattern ourselves after Paul in this respect, keeping all the brethren and sisters in memory, contemplating them one by one in loving and prayerful regard.

"Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and your love to all the saints" (v. 4).

This is a *special love*. We are commanded to love all men—that is, to look with compassion and benevolence upon them and to do them good, even in return for evil. But the love of the *saints* is a *special love*.

How do we know who *are* the saints?—the *holy* ones?—whom we should love in this special way? Paul says of some who were called brethren that they—

"... walked as enemies of the cross of Christ, MINDING EARTHLY THINGS" (Phil. 3:18, 19).

It is not ours to judge, but our deepest love is drawn out to those alone whose hearts are wholly centered on the things of God. Love to the saints means being truly affectionate toward them and interested in them, desiring and enjoying their company. John warns against a "love" that is just in word.

"... for the hope" (v. 5).

That is, "*because of THE HOPE,*" as most versions render it. Love to the saints must be mutually founded on the One Hope, and the Hope must lead to love of the saints, if this hope is not a barren, lifeless one within us.

"The Hope which is laid up for you in heaven."

He says later in the epistle—as he exhorts them to keep their minds on heavenly things—

"Ye are DEAD and your life is HID WITH CHRIST in God" (3:3).

Our hearts and interests must be centered in heaven, for Christ is there and we are part of him. We have died to our nat-

ural selves, and to all things connected with present, passing things of the world.

"Whereof ye have heard before in the WORD of the TRUTH of the GOSPEL."

Here is the solid foundation of all—the Gospel of the Kingdom—the promise of God to Abraham—to Israel—to David—the return of Christ to sweep away all the present evils and sorrows of the world, and to establish universal peace and righteousness, to judge the responsible living and dead, to reward his servants with eternal life with him, and to begin the millennial reign that will bring all the earth to eternal oneness with God: *"the WORD of the TRUTH of the GOSPEL."*

"Which is come unto you and BRINGETH FORTH FRUIT"
(v. 6).

The Gospel *must bring forth fruit in us*, the fruit of the Spirit, the characteristics of godliness. He emphasizes this very strongly, later in the epistle.

"Since the DAY ye heard of it, and knew—experienced—the grace of God in Truth."

The Gospel had begun to work on their hearts and develop fruit from the first day they heard it—this is a wonderful thing—a great mystery of godliness—it is the *powerful, living, spiritual seed sown in the heart.*

"As ye learned of Epaphras, our dear fellow servant."

It would seem from this that Epaphras had been the one who had brought the truth to the Colossians. He was at this time with Paul in Rome, and it would be from him that Paul learned of the Colossians' circumstances and problems. Paul's commendation here would confirm the teachings of Epaphras and strengthen his hand in resisting the errors Paul later mentions.

"Who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit" (v. 8).

The Spirit is the surrounding and bonding and guiding influence. *Love in the Spirit* is love founded upon mutual affection and understanding in spiritual things.

"For this cause also we do not cease to pray for you"
(verse 9).

What does prayer for others accomplish? Does not the salvation of each depend upon their *own* record? And would God's care of His Own children be any less if Paul did not continually pray for them? Do we need other intercession than Christ? Does God have to be urged and reminded to look after his children?—it may be asked.

The mystery of the power of prayer is very wonderful and very real. We must seek to comprehend it. The natural mind cannot comprehend the things of the Spirit of God.

“Pray for one another . . . The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (Jam. 5:16).

It is the gracious will of our Father that we be “*workers together with Him*” in this respect. He assures us that the earnest prayers of those who please Him *do* carry great weight on behalf of others. It is His will that the Body should be one interdependent whole.

Do we exercise this great power and privilege as much as we should? Paul, amid all the pressure of daily things, felt a continual sense of responsibility to pray for the blessing of his brethren. We **MUST** feel the same urgent sense of mutual responsibility. And there is another important consideration—we must labor, too, to be among that well-pleasing class whose prayers alone *are* effective with God.

“That we might be FILLED with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding” (v. 9).

How do *we* compare in this matter? Are we just drifting through life from day to day, absorbed in our daily tasks and problems and desires, like all the rest of the perishing world, or are we consciously filled with these thoughts and *daily getting closer to this ideal?*

Life or death depends upon what we are filled with—what we fill our minds with most of the time—upon the consistency and earnestness of our search for spiritual understanding.

“FILLED with the KNOWLEDGE of His will.”

A *well-founded knowledge* seems to have been the great need of the Colossians. Paul fears that they may be carried away with fanciful theories and crotchets, not having a broad, balanced picture of the Truth as it is in Jesus.

The word “*knowledge*” here is *epi-gnosis*. *Gnosis* is knowledge. *Epi-gnosis* is thorough, or full, knowledge. The Diaglott gives “*EXACT knowledge.*”

The Truth is a lifelong study. To please our Father, our knowledge of what He has revealed must be *detailed and accurate*. There are no short cuts. Learning more and more of the depth and meaning of His Word must be the consuming purpose of our life. We have time for no side issues.

“That ye might WALK WORTHY of the Lord” (v. 10).

We note the significant connection between an *exact knowledge* and a *walking worthy*. Paul makes it clear that we cannot

walk in a manner the Lord considers worthy without a continual application to the broadening and deepening of our knowledge of Him and what He has revealed.

“. . . unto all pleasing.”

This is the only place in the Bible this word appears. It means *to make amends, to seek the favor of another*. It was generally used in a bad sense to indicate a crawling self-abasement to another (just like the word “*ptochos*”—*poor*—which Jesus uses in the expression “*poor in spirit*”), but in a good sense it means fervent devotion—straining every effort and intensely desiring to be approved and accepted.

“*Being fruitful in every good work.*”

A constant, active life of good works for Christ’s sake. Not necessarily anything special, nothing great and spectacular, but in our everyday life and common activity. Everything we do—every word we say—even every thought—is either a *good* work or a *bad* one, according to whether we are consciously trying to please God and obey His commands, or just pleasing ourselves.

“*Increasing in the knowledge of God.*”

Increasing—developing. This is the great purpose of life—*learning, growing, improving*, in every aspect of godliness and spiritual understanding. Can we not, in looking back, see how stupid and blind we have been in so many ways? But it is so hard to discern our *present* stupidity and blindness, yet we know it is there. We must *continually advance*—seeing our own selves more clearly—seeing the mind of God more clearly—realizing how great our darkness and how marvellous the divine light.

Our knowledge is so limited—our ignorance is so great—at best we see but through a glass darkly. But still, growing in the things of God—painfully slow and creeping as it is—is the greatest and most important experience of life. It is a lifelong process, at different stages in different people, and who are we to judge the final result? These thoughts should engender great reverence and great humility.

“*Strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power*” (v. 11).

Actually it is the same word both times—“*EMPOWERED with all POWER according to the ruling or dominion of His glory.*”

This is what our prayers are for—that *God work in us and empower us to overcome*. Of ourselves we can do nothing. We must recognize the utter evil and foolishness of our nature, our

own complete powerlessness to overcome the motions of the flesh—anger, pride, impatience, selfishness, self-pity, fear, desire, greed, despondency, unhappiness. All overcoming is of God.

“Unto all patience and longsuffering WITH JOYFULNESS.”

This is what the man of God is to be strengthened unto. *These things are the heart of the Truth.* These are the things that mark the true children of God. These are the things by which we must examine ourselves to *“see whether we be in the Faith.”*

Patience, in Scripture, is far more than just cold, stoical resignation to the inevitable. It is an active, living, cheerful, persistence in goodness regardless of any contrary circumstances.

Longsuffering must be the basis of all our dealings with others. In the great mercy of God we can be forgiven many things—mistakes, and failures, and blunders in the darkness, but unless—by persistently seeking the power of God—we are strengthened and enlightened in the way of kindness and longsuffering toward all, we shall never stand approved before Him. *Whoever lacks longsuffering is not a godly character, whatever his works and beliefs may be.*

With patience and longsuffering most problems can be solved. Without patience and longsuffering there is no point in even trying to solve anything else, because not only is the task almost hopeless, but even if it succeeds it is but a dead and barren triumph—an intellectual victory but a spiritual failure.

Any manifestation of impatience, or rudeness, or unkindness, or bitterness in any discussion on God’s Way of Truth immediately reveals the whole thing as but fleshly contention—for these spiritual characteristics that Paul specifies here are the *basic principles of the Truth.*

Peter says (2 Pet. 1:8-9) that he that lacketh these things—patience, godliness, brotherly-kindness and love—is *blind, barren* and *unfruitful* in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ—that is, the knowledge of Jesus Christ is in him a barren tree; it is like the talent hid in a napkin that will serve only to condemn its blind possessor.

But we have not even come to the most important part of Paul’s thought—*“with joyfulness.”* That is the most wonderful and unearthly part of all. *No one is living the Truth whose basic frame of mind is not a deep and thankful joyfulness.* Here again we can well *“examine ourselves whether we be in the Faith.”*

This does not mean there will not be sadness and grief, for the Great Example himself was pre-eminently a *"man of sorrows and acquainted with grief."* This present mortal pilgrimage is in so many ways a vale of tears. But through all the passing sadness there runs the deep joyfulness of the eternal purpose. Though many things we cannot understand, we know God is wisdom and love, and if we faithfully serve Him, all will be well at last.

"Giving thanks unto the Father."

Do we find ourselves carried away by this overwhelming sense of thankfulness for all the goodness of God? This again is *part of the essential character of the true saint in Christ Jesus.*

It is this intense thankfulness—the humble recognition of the infinite, unmerited goodness and mercy and kindness of God toward us, that warms and softens us and makes us gentle and compassionate to others.

We are all under the dominion of sin—all in the pit of darkness and corruption: and God—from the great height of His unapproachable holiness—has looked down in mercy upon us. We have all been forgiven ten thousand talents—what are the few pence we have against each other, that we should dare be harsh and unkind?

"Who hath made us meet."

"Meet" means fit or qualified. *It is God who makes His children fit for His Kingdom.* It is God that works in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure. Our simple part is to draw nigh unto Him in love and prayer and reverent study of His Word, and to submit in joyful thankfulness to that divine willing and doing within us.

"Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness"
(Col. 1:13).

Do we realize the greatness of this deliverance?—the terrible reality of this relentless power of darkness and of sin and of death? We take our salvation far too much for granted, and often act as if we were doing God a favor by serving Him. We unconsciously take a self-commending attitude regarding our work in the Truth, as if *we* have done something for *God!*

Jesus said, when they came in the night to seize him—

"This is your hour, and the power of darkness" (Lk. 22:53).

Sin and evil, darkness and death, triumphed for a moment in the schemes of the flesh against the spirit. But in his patience

and submission he led captivity captive. Paul said to the Romans (6:17)—

"Ye were the slaves of sin."

And Jesus said (Jn. 8:34)—

"Whosoever committeth sin is the slave of sin."

Let us keep that thought before our minds. Pleasing the flesh—self-will (which is sin, for *"Whatsoever is not of faith is sin"*) is not freedom but slavery. God has in Christ given us the key to freedom from this servitude of death. Regardless of how great a blessing may be, and of how thankful we are at the first, the natural way of the flesh is, like Israel, to soon take it for granted, and—in the very presence of divine glory—to squabble over petty things and complain of minor inconveniences.

"And hath translated us into the Kingdom of His dear Son."

This passage is relied on heavily by those who teach that believers at present constitute the Kingdom of God, and who deny the true Gospel of the Kingdom. But this requires that we ignore all the plain teachings concerning the establishment of the Kingdom as a worldwide dominion at Christ's return, and the fact that those who inherit it must be immortal.

The word here rendered *"translated"* is the same as *"put out"* or *"removed"* in the passages—

Luke 16:4: *"When I am PUT OUT of the stewardship."*

Acts 13:22: *"When God had REMOVED Saul."*

And the word rendered *"into"* is often translated *for* or *unto*, so the thought here is that God has taken the believers *out of* the dominion of darkness *for*, or *unto*, the coming eternal Kingdom of His Son, as Paul says to Timothy, using a very similar expression (2 Tim. 4:18)—

"The Lord shall preserve me UNTO (same word) His glorious Kingdom."

* * *

"In whom we have redemption through his blood" (Col. 1:14).

Paul is about to speak, in the next few verses, of the supreme position of Jesus in all the works and purpose of God. It is by him, and by him alone, that we have redemption from the power of death and darkness. He is our only gateway to life.

And that redemption is *"through his (shed) blood."* Greater love hath no man than this. *We are not, and dare not be, ordinary people.* We have been purchased and redeemed by a treasure of inestimable value and preciousness—the perfect

life-offering of God's beloved and only begotten son—willingly and lovingly suffered, even to the cruelest, most shameful of deaths.

These are among the things we must ever keep before our minds. *All we do must be in solemn and gracious harmony with these great truths of our redemption and separation from the world.* True joy is divine, but there is no place for folly.

“Even the forgiveness of sins” (v. 14).

Forgiveness is a beautiful thing, when it is an eager and loving forgiveness, anxious for reconciliation, as the Parable of the Prodigal Son shows God's forgiveness to be.

God is strongly *desirous* of forgiving us. He has provided this beautiful way of forgiveness, and pleads with us to accept it. What could He do more? What condescension in One so infinitely high and self-sufficient! With what eagerness we should strive to comply with the terms of His reconciliation!

“Who is the image of the invisible God” (v. 15).

We are led here to the threshold of a subject of great holiness, where we must tread with reverence and reserve. We are told just as much as is sufficient for us—that in the love and wisdom of the Creator man was made in the image of God—that Jesus Christ is His only begotten Son, and that it is His glorious purpose to develop a divine family for Himself from the redeemed of all ages.

“The firstborn of every creature” (v. 15).

One of the principle purposes of this epistle is to establish the foundation of the preeminence of Christ—to bring him plainly to the forefront—to show the vital importance of being *in* him and *holding fast to him*.

There are various dangers the apostle warns them about—philosophy and vain deceit—the keeping of days—self-made regulations of men, well-intentioned indeed, but useless as far as the development of true godliness is concerned. It is very satisfying to create our own regulations of conduct and to glorify ourselves for keeping them, but we are not going deep enough. We are catering to pride, rather than overcoming it.

The only hope is a complete submergence into Christ—a complete emptying and denying of self—a carefulness to learn *his* simple, inner way of righteousness, and to be *“found in him,”* resting wholly upon him, freely confessing our insignificance and hopelessness without him. In his beautiful parable of the vine, he said to all who would follow him—

“Without me you can do nothing” (Jn. 15:5).

A sense of personal achievement, whether in natural or spiritual things, is apt to blind us to the deep truth of that statement. We must get a true perspective of ourselves, and of mankind in general. There have been great men in the past—we do not mean the petty potsherd of the earth: the Napoleons, the Washingtons, the Caesars: but such men as Moses, Abraham and Paul—truly great men in a divine, eternal sense.

But they were nothing compared to Christ. Casting themselves upon God, they were empowered to do a great work each in their day, but all the meaning and value of their work depended upon Christ alone.

Any straying away from him—any assertion of our own individuality—any self-reliance—any pride or dependence upon self—and we are lost.

“The firstborn of every creature” (v. 15).

This is made clear in v. 18: *“The beginning, the firstborn from the dead.”* Christ is the firstborn of the Sons of God taken from among men, the beginning, the foundation stone upon which all is built, the forerunner, the Head of the Body; first and chief in every respect.

“By him were all things created” (v. 16).

The Revised Version and Diaglott have this *“in HIM”*—all the eternal purpose is built upon and contained *in HIM*.

“Whether they be thrones, dominions, principalities, or powers.”

What are these? Paul speaks of them as *visible and invisible*. In heaven and in earth—all powers, all rulerships, all dominion and authority focuses in him. He is saying more emphatically what Jesus himself said after his resurrection (Matt. 28:18)—

“All authority is given unto me in heaven and in earth.”

For this end was he born. To this end was all arranged from the beginning. We have heard theories even among some who know the Truth, about there being other worlds, and other processes of salvation going on, outside of Christ, but Paul here shows him to be, under the Father, *supreme in heaven and earth*.

“He is before all things, and by him all things consist” (verse 17).

Literally, as in the N.A.R., *“in him all things hold together.”* This defines his supremacy very vividly—the whole framework of the divine purpose—the whole eternal building is held up, and held together, by him.

“He is the Head of the Body, the Ecclesia” (v. 18).

The Ecclesia is a body having many members. The members have been scattered in all parts of the world, and in all generations, but they are all one in Christ. In him there is a oneness to their lives, wherever and whenever they have lived. This oneness knits them together in a love whose depth the world cannot comprehend.

"For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell" (v. 19).

It pleased God to manifest Himself in and through the Son in every aspect of the divine nature and character (Matt. 3:17)—

"This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

Jesus said (Jn. 8:29)—

"I do always those things that please the Father."

How simple, and yet how profound, was his way of life!—the ruling principle of his conduct—

"Not my will, but Thine, be done" (Lk. 22:42).

Paul said— *"He pleased not himself."*

For a few brief years he *pleased not himself*, but gave every moment of his life to pleasing the Father—and now he hath a Name above every name. How simple, and yet how profound! What a simple formula of eternal success, and yet what prayer and self-control to carry it through!

The relationship of the Father and Son—the love, the unity, the victory, the glory—is the perfect example of the Father's great purpose with men.

"Having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him He reconciled all things to Himself" (v. 20).

*It is good to be continually reminded of the blood of the cross, and how it was needed to bring peace between God and man—*how in all things God must be exalted, His righteousness manifested, His holiness declared.

God having through Christ laid the foundation of holiness, He purposed through him to reconcile all things to Himself—to develop a state of things, all radiating from Christ, in which all will be in beautiful and eternal harmony.

"You that were some time alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works" (v. 21).

The natural man, however good and well-meaning, is in this category. To the Ephesians Paul says that the natural man is alienated from God by ignorance, blindness and darkened understanding. What the world calls good is *not* good. Only true, enlightened harmony with God is good—*all* else is evil.

Man must face these facts of his natural state and seek to be delivered from the darkness of ignorance and wickedness into the light of knowledge and obedience.

Paul says in v. 22 that Jesus had reconciled them to God—
“*In the body of his flesh, through death*” (v. 22).

He reminds them of the great price paid—the *one way to life that was opened with such sorrow and pain, and yet such glory and joy.*

“*To present you holy, and unblamable, and unreprou-
able in His sight.*”

The apostle tells us here that it is Christ’s purpose and work to present the redeemed unto God “*holy and unblamable and unreprouable.*” It is his work and purpose to develop a group of people in this condition of holiness and perfection.

To the Ephesians the apostle says similarly that it was Jesus’ purpose to present his Bride “*holy and without blemish, spot or wrinkle.*” And in v. 28 here he speaks of his own work—

“*That we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.*”

Now what we are concerned with is: *What does this “holiness” and “blamelessness” and “spotlessness” and “perfection” mean as far as we are concerned? What does it entail? What is expected of us? What is required, and what is possible?*

These are practical questions, and we should face them as such. We should face these things in their literal import, regardless of how we may find ourselves to compare with them. Then we should set ourselves the full time task of approaching as close as we can to them, never underestimating the mighty power that He has promised will work in us *just as long as we faithfully do our part.*

Beyond that, everything rests upon God’s compassion and mercy. But LET US AT LEAST RECOGNIZE WHAT WE ARE TO AIM AT AND STRIVE FOR, and the continuous effort and study that is expected.

In chapter three Paul speaks specifically of many of the distinguishing marks of the state he describes as “*holy and blameless*”—marks by which we can measure ourselves. Among the requirements Paul lists are—

Fixing the heart on heavenly things;

Not setting our interests on any present things;

Putting to death the evil tendencies and reactions of the flesh;

Mercy, kindness, humbleness, meekness, longsuffering, forbearance, forgiveness, love;

Allowing the peace of God to rule the heart;
Allowing the Word of Christ to dwell within us in all wisdom;
Every word and deed done in the Name of Jesus and in thanksgiving to God;

The speech always pure, and sober, and gracious;

Walking always in wisdom—“*Wisdom excelleth folly as light excelleth darkness.*”

These are some of the elements of the holiness of which the apostle speaks.

“If ye continue in the Faith, grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel” (Col. 1:23).

To be moved away from the hope of the Gospel does not just mean to *openly* leave the Truth. There are other equally disastrous, and far more subtle, ways we can be “*moved away.*”

Other interests can take more and more of our attention—interests that may be perfectly legitimate and necessary *up to a point*—as our daily bread, or our family, or our home.

Or we can gradually get our knowledge of the Truth unbalanced and distorted by being absorbed by certain aspects to the extent of their becoming crotchets. It is so easy and so natural to just keep going around and around on the same subject or two, instead of truly *studying the Scriptures as a whole*, and developing knowledge of the whole Truth on a broad front.

“I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his Body’s sake, which is the Ecclesia” (Col. 1:24).

Paul was writing from prison. He who was so concerned and anxious to be going about caring for the brethren, was unjustly *confined and kept in bonds*. And though he was so powerful a preacher of righteousness, and though workers were so few, still God left him in prison for years at a time. *Why?* The ways of God are not our ways. There are many aspects to His wisdom and His purpose. He has other things to accomplish for which an imprisoned Paul was more powerful than a Paul at liberty.

How difficult it is to bring ourselves to realize the hard realities of these sufferings of the men of God in the past! But we *must*, for all these things have essential lessons for our salvation, and unless we in reverent humility learn them, then for us they have suffered in vain.

Why did God allow Paul to be put and kept in such distressing and humiliating and frustrating circumstances, when he could have been triumphantly spreading the Gospel far and wide? The progress of God’s work is not to be measured

by outward results. The eternal results are deep and hidden things.

Paul *rejoiced* in the beatings and abuse and hardships he experienced, in that he was *completing the sufferings of Christ* for the ecclesia. The wise of the world would have long scientific names for Paul's rejoicing at what they would consider useless suffering, and which would reflect upon his mental balance but *how little does natural man know of the ways of the Spirit of God!* How careful we must be to keep an independent mind, undented by the world's foolish, passing theories.

Does Paul's viewpoint seem beautiful and reasonable and satisfying to us, or does it seem foolish? In this we can test our spiritual perception. We must try to perceive the beauty and meaning of the ways of God.

What good did the sufferings of Paul do for the Ecclesia of Christ? What good did the sufferings of Christ do for his Body's sake? We know he had to die, but why did he have to suffer?

The answer lies in the deep problems involved in the development of the characters of his brethren—the principles to be established—the lessons to be taught—the transforming bond of love to be created by the power of righteousness. Perhaps we realize all too little the seriousness and importance of what must be done in breaking down the hard shell of the natural man.

The sufferings of Christ and of Paul—gladly endured in love for the brethren—should help us in breaking up the thoughtless hardness of our hearts. This should be kept constantly before our minds—the vision of these self-sacrificing men. Then gradually we shall see things in a clear, divine light.

We must learn and share the glorious secret of their joy in tribulation. It is all a matter of perspective—of where the heart is fixed—of what the hopes are centered on—of what is realized to be important, and what is seen to be desirable.

Animal comfort and pleasure is not the supreme essence of goodness, though the world measures its civilization and progress by it. *Spiritual joy* is a far deeper and more intense enjoyment, and it has no relation to either physical comfort or material possession.

These men realized that in the deep wisdom of God their sufferings were purposeful and necessary in bringing many sons to glory—necessary in breaking up the hard clods of the flesh

and bringing to perfection the beautiful fruits of the Spirit. Even of Jesus himself it was said (Heb. 5:8)—

“He LEARNED OBEDIENCE by the things that he suffered.”

And suffering today, which we often cannot understand, or see any possible purpose or reason for, is in some inscrutable way serving the same divine purpose. It is opening closed minds and softening hard hearts—often completely unknown to the weary sufferer. The glorious Body of Christ must—like their Head—enter the Kingdom through the refining of much tribulation.

This subject of the sufferings of the Body of Christ is a strange and beautiful one. How little we know of the ways of God! How little we understand of the true values of life! How little we comprehend of the forces involved in the mortal battle between flesh and Spirit!

Still, through the conflicts and the shadows—we can even now dimly perceive the workings of wisdom and beauty.

Beside his constant sufferings from without, the apostle bore within himself a personal and distressing *“thorn in the flesh—a messenger of Satan to buffet him, lest he should be exalted above measure.”*

Three times he pleaded to be freed from it, but the Lord’s gracious but firm answer was—

“My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9).

And thereafter Paul no longer fretted for release, but found peace through the very medium of his suffering—

“Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmity . . . for when I am weak, then am I strong!” (v. 10).

Is not this the glorious strength we all desire? What then if it need be made perfect in weakness? Are we not safe and strong when we are in the humility of weakness, but weak and in danger when we are in the pride of strength?

In Colossians 1:26 the apostle speaks of the mystery that had been hidden from ages and from generations. He explains it as—

“The riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is CHRIST IN YOU, THE HOPE OF GLORY” (v. 27).

“Christ in you, the hope of glory.” Is Christ in us? Jesus said, as he was about to give himself up to death—

"If any man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and WE WILL COME UNTO HIM AND MAKE OUR ABODE WITH HIM" (Jn. 14:23).

This is the marvellous blessing we must constantly seek—that he come unto us and make his abode with us.

"Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27).

The promise depends, he says, on loving him and keeping his Word—*learning it, remembering it, holding it ever before us.* To the Galatians Paul said—

"My little children, of whom I travail in birth again UNTIL CHRIST BE FORMED IN YOU" (Gal. 4:19).

The forming of Christ in them is the birth of the new man. This is the *"hope of glory."* Unless the new man of Christlike disposition and gentleness is born, and the old man of the flesh is resolutely and determinedly put away, *no amount of knowledge of the Truth will avail.* Therefore Paul continues—

"Whom we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present EVERY MAN PERFECT IN CHRIST JESUS" (v. 28).

Let us recognize and realize the importance Paul attached to this matter of presenting *"every man perfect in Christ Jesus."* He continues in verse 29—

"Whereunto (that is, the presenting of every man perfect) I also labor, striving according to His working, which worketh in me mightily."

Paul, in all his sufferings, was striving and agonizing for the perfection of those in his care, realizing the *seriousness* of the issues, and how *hard* it was to awaken them to the *importance* of what had to be done in them. How few realize the terrible *urgency* of these things! Let us be sure we *understand* what Paul was so anxious and concerned about—this *"presenting of every man perfect in Christ Jesus."* He continues, beginning the next chapter (2:1, 2)—

"For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you . . . that your hearts may be KNIT TOGETHER IN LOVE, and unto all riches of the full assurance of UNDERSTANDING."

Love—and understanding. This matter of being *"knit together in love"* is not just a form of words. It is a pressing matter of the most urgent importance. It is a vital characteristic of the True Body of Christ. *No group that is not knit together in love can possibly be part of the Body of Christ.* He made this the great distinguishing feature of his brethren (Jn. 13:35)—

"By this—BY THIS—shall all men know that ye are my disciples, IF ye have love one to another."

It must be a very remarkable affection to be such a mark of distinction. It is not something we can just leave to happen of itself. It is something we must give careful *attention* and *effort* to. It is a specific *command*, and must be observed and *obeyed*, just like any other *command*, regardless of our natural feeling in the matter. Jesus said—

"A new COMMANDMENT I give unto you—that ye LOVE ONE ANOTHER" (Jn. 13:34).

Nor can we leave it in the realm of hazy abstraction and vague good intentions. We must deliberately pursue it further, and get down to *specific facts* and *concrete evidence*. Putting aside all petty annoyances, we must see each other as the holy saints of God in various degrees of development.

The mind of the Spirit has—through Paul—given us a clear delineation and definition of what the Scriptures mean by love, and expect as evidence of it—

"Love suffereth long, and is kind" (1 Cor. 13:4).

If we are not infinitely kind and longsuffering to one another, we are violating this great command of Christ—we are not part of the Body of Christ. There is no use speaking of doctrine if we ignore these basic first principles of conduct.

"Love is not easily provoked: thinketh no evil" (1 Cor. 13:5).

If we are part of the True Bride of Christ, we shall be marked—above *all things*—by the manifestation of these beautiful evidences of scriptural love—especially toward one another. This is the forming of Christ in us—the *only possible* hope of glory—which Paul was so intensely anxious to bring to fruition in his brethren.

"And unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ: in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:2, 3).

"ALL the riches of the full assurance of understanding . . . ALL the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." The apostle has spoken of *love*. Now he speaks of *understanding*. Both are essential to the perfect man.

"IN WHOM are hid ALL the treasures of wisdom."

Paul seems to have reason to fear that the Colossians attached value to knowledge that was not related to Christ.

He is laboring to open their understandings to the fact that, in the wisdom of God, *everything* radiates from Christ as light

from the sun, and that there is nothing outside of him but darkness. ALL human wisdom is darkness—often very skillfully woven darkness, but darkness for all that.

"IN HIM are hid—concealed—bound up—ALL the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

"In him" is the theme of this portion of the epistle. "In HIM" or "with HIM" occurs in nearly every one of the following dozen verses. All wisdom and knowledge are to be found only in Christ. The riches of these treasures, Paul says, are "hidden." To the Corinthians he said—

"We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom God ordained before the world unto our glory" (1 Cor. 2:7).

"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. But he that is spiritual discerneth all things. We have the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:14-16).

The Proverbs have much to say of this hidden wisdom, of its priceless value and the great need of seeking diligently for it (Prov. 2:2-5)—

*"Incline thine ear unto wisdom;
Apply thine heart to understanding;
Cry after knowledge;
Lift up thy voice for understanding;
Seek her as silver;
Search for her as for hid treasures—
—THEN thou shalt understand the fear of the Lord, and
find the knowledge of God."*

Are we sufficiently impressed with the urgency of this *tireless* search for the hidden wisdom of God? How much time do we devote *each day* to this search?—or are we just too busy with perishing things?

Do these instructions just mean attending the meetings and doing the readings, or do they mean *much more*—something *very special*—even the complete dedication of a lifelong seeking to draw ever closer to the mind of God? We believe this is what is meant, and *this is what will be expected*.

"I am with you in spirit, joying and beholding your order (your mutual godly discipline and harmony) and the steadfastness of your faith" (Col. 2:5).

"Order" is a very beautiful thing, provided it is not just stiff and mechanical, but is based on a free and essential harmony and oneness of mind and purpose. *All God's works, from small-*

est to greatest, manifest the beauty and wisdom of order. Disorder and confusion are incompatible with godliness.

“As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him” (v. 6).

If ye have taken on Christ—recognized him as the only way of life—*then take care to continue to walk within him.* There is a certain area of conduct that is described as “*IN Christ*”—a certain frame of mind—a certain course of action—a certain range of thought and interest. Other than this is *out of Christ.* Christ is the covering, so any activity outside this narrow path that is in him is described as “*walking naked and in shame.*” *That is how God regards it.*

“Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the traditions of men, and not after Christ” (v. 8).

It is almost inevitable that we shall be influenced by the thinking of the world. The world puts on such an imposing show of knowledge and learning in its science and education.

Much, of course, of what it teaches is true. This is where the great difficulty arises, for *theory and presumption and the thinking of the flesh are so inseparably mixed with fact in all the world’s educational system.*

“Philosophy and vain deceit”—subtle reasoning and plausible arguments. He bids us beware of the thinking of the natural mind. *The human mind unaided has not the capacity for sound reason.* Apart from direct divine guidance and revelation there is no restraint to the foolishness the most respectable intellect will accept.

The Scriptures are very strong in their warnings against the deceptions of the world’s wisdom, teaching us that the only safety is measuring everything by the rule of Christ—

“In him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (verse 9).

This term “*Godhead*” does not carry a very clear meaning. It is used by the churches of the world for the Trinity, and therefore many thoughtlessly take this to teach the Trinity, but the word really means *that which is related to God.* All that is godly—all that God is—*dwells in Christ.* God is manifested in him in perfection.

It is God’s purpose and desire to be *manifested in perfection in a multitude.* This is the essence of His eternal plan.

Christ is the Head of that multitude—the Forerunner and perfect Example—the great Pattern for all to follow.

"And ye are complete in him" (v. 10).

Literally this is: "Ye are **FILLED FULL**"—the whole thought is: "In him is the **FULL** manifestation of God, and ye are **FILLED FULL IN HIM.**"

He is the reservoir and medium of transmission. He is the golden bowl of the Zechariah lampstand, containing and transmitting the golden Spirit oil to the seven-fold ecclesial lamp.

"Buried **WITH HIM** in baptism, wherein ye are also risen **WITH HIM**" (v. 12).

How beautiful a symbol baptism is of the complete change effected by the union with Christ—of the death to all the old, and a birth to newness of life *completely and safely in him*—

"You being **DEAD** in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together **WITH HIM**" (verse 13).

In our natural state we are *dead*—dead in sins, and dead in our Gentile separation from the Abrahamic covenant which is the keystone of the world's destiny.

As we look out upon the sea of humanity—all are dead in God's sight—a vast multitude of dead.

We *must* get the scriptural viewpoint; we *must* see them in this light; we must be constantly aware of the complete separation of our position as *made alive* in Christ—not in pride but in the deepest humility of constant self-examination; not in indifference, but in deepest sympathy and benevolent desire.

"Having forgiven you **ALL** trespasses" (v. 13).

In Christ, *all* is washed away. How infinite is the graciousness of God! How free and unrestrained the operation of His mercy—nothing measured or meted out, but boundless forgiveness! We must be the same. We dare not be small and calculating like the petty little hoarders of the world.

"Having forgiven you **ALL** trespasses."

—having swept them all away with one glorious motion of transcendent love. Can we give less than everything in return? Can we give *limited* service in return for such *unlimited* grace?

"Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us" (v. 14).

The handwriting of ordinances was the Law of Moses—not just the Law of Moses as such, but that Law as it stood for all "Thou shalt" and "Thou shalt not" ordinances.

The Colossians were in danger of slipping back into a religion of ordinances, living under the rule of "Thou shalt not." They

forgot that the purpose of the Law was to bring all flesh under condemnation—to show all men that it is impossible for them to *earn* life on their own merits by obedience to a law—because of the weakness of the flesh. The better the Law, the more impossible the obedience.

Law is a schoolmaster—a “*pedagog*”—a “*child-leader*”—to *bring us to Christ*—to lead the Jewish nation, to lead mankind, to lead every individual—up to Christ.

How vividly this principle is manifested in the growth of children! When we have completed the slow, painful, but glorious transition from the *rule of Law* to the *rule of Love*, then we have finally reached maturity and manhood—the full stature of the perfect man in Christ Jesus.

That is the great lesson Paul is teaching here. “*Thou shalt*” must give place to “*If ye love me.*” All the “*Thou shalt's*” were nailed to the cross—all the hopelessness of man’s weakness and failure.

“*Having spoiled—the word means ‘stripped’ ‘laid bare’—principalities and powers (governments and authorities)” (v. 15).*

Having laid bare—exposed—the powerlessness of the rule of law to lead man to life—having shown it to be but a ministration of death to teach men humility—he triumphed over it *in Him*—in God: not Jesus alone as a man, but *God in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself.*

“*Let no man therefore judge you in meat, drink, holy day, new moon, sabbaths—which are a shadow of things to come, but the body is of Christ” (vs. 16, 17).*

Paul, of course, is speaking of the Law of Moses, but the lesson is just as vital for us. We cannot find life by a rule of external regulations—the flesh hasn’t the power to do it, and if it could it still would not change the *character*. It must be “*If ye love me*” or nothing. Nothing else has the power of spiritual transformation.

“*If ye do NOT love me (Christ)*” there is no point in trying to be good just because you love *yourself*. We can only attain to life *through Christ, by love.*

“*Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels” (v. 18).*

Inventing forms and objects and methods of worship has always been a great religious danger. “*Voluntary humility*” includes everything we self-pleasingly impose upon ourselves and others that is not part of the *basic simplicity in Christ.*

Our one great duty in Christ is the overcoming and complete transforming of our character, but our natural tendency is to seek an easy satisfaction in self-imposed tasks which cater to the pride of humility but do not touch the basic problems of real character.

"And NOTHOLDING THE HEAD from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, INCREASETH WITH THE INCREASE OF GOD" (v. 19).

All the Body, from the Head, increaseth with the increase of God! What a beautiful treasury of truth is contained in that verse! How fitting is this divine symbol of the people of God as One Body all harmoniously knit together in One Perfect Man—all parts interdependent, with the unifying power of life and health freely coursing through the whole, all acting in perfect conformity with the will and guidance of the Head!

How wonderfully this teaches us of our dependence upon one another, and above all, upon CHRIST!—

". . . the HEAD, FROM, WHICH all the body increaseth with the increase of God."

Modern versions have rendered this in all sorts of ways in an attempt to bring out the meaning better, but none seem to express it as well as the common version.

Are we, brethren and sisters, parts of this glorious body—inseparably bound up with Christ in all our thoughts and actions—constantly *increasing with the increase of God?*

"Wherefore, if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why as though living in the world are ye subject to ordinances, as: 'Touch not, taste not, handle not'?" (vs. 20, 21).

Why do you act like *ordinary* people—why do you depend on the *old*, useless methods of self-discipline when you have—by union with Christ—completely *died* to all such things, and taken on a completely *new way of righteousness* as *part of him*.

"Which are to perish with the using" (v. 22).

That is, they are not matters of eternal value; they do not affect the basic issues of godliness and holiness. The ordinances of the Law were *shadows* of the true—the cleanlinesses of the Law were *types* of the true cleanliness of the heart—the sacrifices of the Law were *symbols* of the true living sacrifice that the love of Christ requires.

Of themselves they all accomplished nothing but the teaching of lessons and pointing to what must be done to the

character and life. *External* regulations and ordinances do not go *deep* enough—they do not transform the *heart*.

“Which things indeed have a SHOW of wisdom in will worship and humility and neglecting of the body” (v. 23).

We think of Paul’s words (1 Cor. 13:3)—

“Though I give all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not LOVE, I am NOTHING.”

How *easy* to be *self-deceived*! How easy to create in *man’s* sight an impression of godliness and self-sacrifice when actually in *God’s* sight it is all a self-gratifying form of fleshly pride. Truly the heart of man is *“deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked!”* (Jer. 17:9).

How great the need for constant self-examination, constant searching of the Word, constant prayer for deliverance from the deceptiveness of our own hearts!

“Not in any honor (but) to the satisfying of the flesh”
(verse 23).

A comma after *“honor”* would make the sense clearer, or the insertion of *“but,”* as indicated. All these self-pleasing labors and devotions have no divine honor or virtue, but are simply to the satisfying of the pride of the flesh.

Instead of *mortifying* the flesh and really *improving* the character, they are actually *pleasing* the flesh, as when men—in violation of God’s law—seek worldly wisdom and worldly wealth on the plea of desiring to *“use it in God’s service.”*

“If then ye be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above . . . for ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God” (Col. 3:1, 3).

All the affections of the True Bride of Christ are fixed on the things of God, on her glorious Bridegroom, and on their future, eternal joys together.

Present things hold no interest for her, except as they are related to the divine purpose. No true brother of Christ can have his heart in any *present* things—they are all but passing shadows of the night. Verse 5—

“Mortify therefore your members which are upon earth”

—mortify—*put to death*—all that is earthy in you. We notice that among other earthy things, he mentions one that is universal in the flesh—*covetousness*—greed—the desire to have—the universal urge to possess desirable things.

What is wrong with that? Just this: any attachment to *earthy* things is to that extent a hindrance to affection for *heavenly* things. Covetousness is, therefore, one of the greatest and

commonest stumblingblocks to godliness. Covetousness—the desire to have and enjoy the nice things of the world—pulls the heart down and shackles it to the earth, dimming and obscuring the joy and glory and keen desire for the future. It is, in its very essence, the very opposite of self-denying godliness.

“Ye have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him Who created him” (Col. 3:9, 10).

“Renewed in knowledge”—

“This is life eternal, that they might KNOW Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent” (Jn. 17:3).

Do we truly *know* God and Christ? To know in this sense is to be united with Him in harmonious understanding—to be of one mind, and interest, and character.

We do not know God when we are interested in passing, worldly things. To know God we must keep our minds set on the things that God is interested in, as He has revealed them to us in His Word.

“Renewed in KNOWLEDGE.” The natural man is based on ignorance—a creature of darkness, influenced only by natural things. But the new man is built on knowledge and light. He is instructed in the wisdom that is from above. By the light of the Word, lovingly and constantly studied, his mind is drawn upward to rest in heavenly things, and his character is made gentle and pure after the example of Christ.

“Put on therefore as the elect of God, mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering” (v. 12).

“As the elect of God.” Are we the elect of God? There **MUST** be such, for the Scriptures so often speak of such a class, in language of great beauty—a glorious, separated few, knit together in divine holiness.

“The elect of God, holy and beloved.” It seems like tremendous presumption to consider that we, of all the earth’s millions, may be such.

But if we fulfil the simple requirements that the love of God has specified, we *are* the *“elect of God, holy and beloved.”* This honor is free and open to all, yet it is very exclusive, for so few seek it with *all* their heart, and only such can ever find it.

Many seek it with *part* of their heart—sometimes a *large* part—but that is not enough. God’s elect are those few who give God *all* their heart—who yield themselves *completely* to Him.

“Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, even as Christ forgave you” (v. 13).

A divine, mutual kindness is one infallible mark of the True Bride. Where that is lacking there is no spiritual life.

“And ABOVE all these things PUT ON LOVE, which is the bond of perfectness” (v. 14).

Above all these things—beyond these things—over all this mutual mercy, kindness, humbleness, meekness, long-suffering, forbearance, forgiveness—put on *love*.

The only true love in all the world is that divine oneness of heart and mind that unites the elect of God in pure and perfect affection—the bond—binding together—*of perfectness*.

“We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren” (1 Jn. 3:14).

Have we passed from death to life? Is *love for the brethren* our distinguishing characteristic? Love has infinite patience and kindness—even toward all men—but *above all* to the *brethren*. Faithfulness often makes rebuke necessary, and sometimes separation, but even this **MUST** be done in love, with meekness—a true sympathy, recognizing the mutual weakness and limitations of poor, fallen human nature—and above all, not a hypocritical, self-righteous, lip service “*love*.”

“And let the peace of God rule in your hearts” (v. 15).

Let it rule—*permit* it to—God desires His peace to preside over us. We are exhorted to *allow* it to do so. It is a blessing that He is anxious to bestow. Perhaps, of this whole epistle, this is the one thought to keep uppermost in our minds, as the crowning blessing of all—

“LET the peace of God rule in your hearts.”

Give yourself over to its healing and relaxing influence. Let us try to remember to say this to ourselves from time to time during the course of each day—*“LET the peace of God rule in your hearts.”*

This word “*rule*” is very interesting. It means to arbitrate, to preside, to be an umpire, to settle questions and problems, to determine who is the winner, to award the prize. This is the only place the word occurs, though the related noun occurs twice as “*prize*.” The apostle urges us to permit God’s peace to rule supreme in our hearts, presiding over all issues and settling every conflict, awarding the joyful prize of godliness.

Are we opening our hearts to Him and allowing His peace to work its marvellous work within us, or are we in fleshly blindness missing this transcendent comfort?—“careful and troubled about many things,” when only one is needed—a discernment of the beauty and value of the “*peace of God*.”

"And be ye thankful" (v. 15).

It is a sad commentary on human forgetfulness that we should need to be constantly reminded to be thankful. But we *do* need it. *We entertain so many moods and desires that are utterly incompatible with thankfulness.* We cannot be thankful and *irritable* at the same time—or thankful and *discouraged*, or thankful and *impatient*.

Thankfulness is a pleasant and joyful mood—a recognition of eternal and all overshadowing goodness. It is inseparably linked to God's peace. It is not the little passing *flashes* of thankfulness that is meant—like that of a dog for a scrap of meat—but the calm, cheerful thankfulness that is a consistent, all-pervading frame of mind and way of life.

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom"
(v. 16).

Here again—*let it, permit it.* Is the acquiring of wisdom from the Word as easy as that—just *let it come?*

Yes, IF WE CLEAR THE WAY and set our whole hearts upon it. But we cannot fill our minds and interests with other things and still expect the word of Christ to force its way in. It requires effort, and study, and application—not just because God wants to make it hard and discouraging, but because He will only open Himself up to those who love Him sufficiently to give their whole lives to seeking to know Him.

Unless the love of God—*desire to know Him, desire to please Him*—dominates our whole lives, the word of Christ will never dwell in us richly in all wisdom, and all our talk about "*poor memories*" and "*inability to understand*" is but a pitiful evasion. *The problem is not memories, but hearts.*

"Teaching and admonishing one another in hymns and psalms and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (v. 16).

This is a beautiful instruction and worthy of deep consideration. It is far more significant, in terms of basic principles, than we are apt to realize.

Do we associate the spirit of song with our teaching? This is the kind of teaching that gladdens and transforms—

"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings!" (Isa. 52:7).

Our teaching and admonishing—even our *ADMONISHING*, we note—must never be harsh, or cold, or merely technical and intellectual, but in the gentle, joyful spirit of singing with grace in our hearts.

“And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the Name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to our God and Father by him” (v. 17).

He is not just speaking of things to do with the Truth—he is speaking of *everything* we do. This is clear from verses 23, 24 where, concluding his instructions to servants, he says—

“WHATSOEVER YE DO, do it HEARTILY, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that OF THE LORD ye shall receive the reward.”

Our weekly paycheck is *“of the Lord.”* He is our true employer. All others are incidental. All we do is actually just between Him and us direct. Therefore every word, every deed, should be done with the consciousness that it is *unto God*. *“Do it HEARTILY”*—give it everything you have.

Does this seem an extreme and impossible command? It all depends *where our heart* is, as to whether this is an insufferable burden or a joyful delight. The apostle goes even further in writing to the Corinthians (2:10:5)—

“Bring into captivity every THOUGHT to the obedience of Christ.”

No man can serve two masters. No man can give his heart to a divided allegiance. All the power and joy of the service of God is in its all-embracing *completeness*—its utter and intense singleness of heart and soul.

* * *

Chapter 4 is principally occupied with sundry greetings to and from the brethren. We know so little about these earnest and faithful men, and yet these personal sections add so much to the living power and beauty of Paul's epistles.

Think of what a loss the omission of these parts would be—*Tychicus*—a beloved brother, and a faithful minister and fellow-servant in the Lord.

Onesimus—a faithful and beloved brother.

Aristarchus—Paul's fellow-prisoner.

Marcus—nephew to Barnabas, whose youthful failure of courage years before was the cause of the sad rift between Barnabas and Paul.

The Colossians have a special commandment to welcome him if he comes to them. Why? The circumstances of the separating of Paul and Barnabas would be bound to be known throughout the brotherhood. Even years later it would be remembered. It would create a very difficult path for Mark to

tread, wherever he went. There would often be embarrassment on both sides as he met the brethren.

But he seems to have overcome, and established himself as a worthy and useful brother. In Paul's closing days he wrote to Timothy that Mark was profitable to him for the ministry, and there were few who stood by Paul at that time.

We cannot help being saddened by the incident that separated Paul and Barnabas, after they had endured so much together. We never hear of Barnabas again. He drops right out of the story, his place taken by a new companion—Silas.

But right at the end of Paul's life, he speaks with appreciation of the help and support of Mark, so we can feel assured that Paul and Barnabas were fully reconciled.

And there was a brother with Paul called Jesus. How strange it seems for a brother to be called Jesus—though this is the Greek form of Joshua—a common name among the Jews.

These, said Paul, were his fellow-workers unto the Kingdom of God, who had been a comfort to him. How wonderful is the comfort afforded by faithful brethren!

Epaphras, a servant of Christ, always laboring fervently in prayer.

Luke, the beloved physician. Why does Paul mention him in this way—*"the beloved physician"*?

From Luke's first appearance in the record, at the time Paul saw the vision of the man of Macedonia—right to the end of Paul's life, Luke seems to have attached himself to Paul.

Wherever we see the word *"we"* in the Acts, we can discern the faithful Luke attending Paul in all his travels.

And in Paul's very last epistle (2 Tim. 4:11), when he was old and about to be put to death, he said—

"Only Luke is with me."

Can we not see one who, in love to the Truth and to the apostle, had given himself as a constant companion to minister to Paul in all his trials—*"Luke, the beloved physician."*

The terrible hardships and maltreatment that Paul constantly endured would affect the health of the strongest, but there are several indications that Paul also suffered from physical disabilities.

A gentle minister of healing would be a great comfort to one whose life was composed of such labor, pain and distress, and who gave every ounce of his strength in the service of his brethren (2 Cor. 1:8)—

“Pressed out of measure, above strength, despairing even of life.”

—that is how he himself describes the path he trod for Christ.

“And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it” (v. 17).

Who Archippus was we do not know. Whether this is a reproof or an encouragement we cannot tell. But its value lies in its lessons for us—

“Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received.”

Like Archippus, we too have a ministry of the Lord. We have work to do—principally within ourselves, but also in relation to all with whom we come in contact—to manifest to them the beauty of the divine pattern of godliness and holiness.

The apostle concludes: *“Remember my bonds.”* We are told to remember many things. Remembrance—keeping in memory—holds the issues between life and death.

Why *“Remember my BONDS”*? We are taken back to his words in the first chapter—

“I REJOICE in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind in the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his Body’s sake.”

In all that you do, *remember my sufferings for you, and the suffering of Christ.* Let the remembrance of them soften and purify your hearts, and raise your minds to higher and more noble things than your own selfish desires and interests.

“Grace be with you.”

Do we have a clear idea in our minds what *“Grace be with you”* means? Grace is a broad inclusive word, a balanced combination of many beautiful characteristics. It is the sum-total of graciousness. It includes both the attitude and operation of God *toward* the believer, and the manifestation of godliness *by and in* the believer.

It is defined as loveliness, favor, kindness, goodwill, thankfulness, pleasantness, friendship, beauty of character—

“Grace be with you . . . Amen.”

Without the Camp

“God, Who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son” (Heb. 1:1).

In this first verse, the whole message of the book of Hebrews is summed up. This epistle has a two-fold purpose: To demonstrate from the Hebrews' own Scriptures that the Law of Moses was a temporary and incomplete thing—that eternal completeness and perfection are found only in Christ, and secondly, to impress not only the Hebrews but all believers of all ages with the tremendous and glorious holiness and responsibility of their high calling in Christ Jesus.

The first three verses express the supreme position of Christ in God's plan.

The rest of chapter 1 shows particularly his superiority to the angels. The Law of Moses, the *“ministration of angels,”* was very rightly highly esteemed by the Jews; but Paul clearly shows that things were written of the promised Messiah that proved him to be of immeasurably greater authority and honor than the angels.

* * *

Chapter 2 begins with a warning. This characteristic appears throughout, as the apostle again and again pauses to try to impress his readers with the seriousness of their position as related to these holy and divine things.

He constantly labors to awaken them to an active realization of the comforts of God's love to the faithful, and the terrors of His severity upon the careless, worldly and self-willed.

Lest they be fatally lulled by a wishful presumption on His mercy, he calls attention to the *terrible reality of God's judgments in the past* on those who blindly felt secure. And he points out that the law of Christ—rather than *lessening* the danger—**INCREASES** it to the careless, being such a more personal and intimate approach by God to man.

In the rest of chapter 2, Paul shows by Scripture—

(1) that it is not the angels (as under the Mosaic Law) but the pre-appointed MAN of God who is to rule supreme in the future eternal order and—

(2) that it was essential to his mission as the overcomer and destroyer of sin that he pass through a phase of weakness, struggle and death.

The Jews looked only for a Messiah of vengeance, majesty and power. How sad and shortsighted! Paul points out that their first and greatest need (as ours) was not to be saved from outside enemies, but being saved from themselves—from their own sins, their own evil natures—from their helpless condition of alienation from God and their inevitable destiny of final death and oblivion. How insignificant a thing was their servitude to Rome, when compared to their servitude to Sin!

"Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest, to make reconciliation, for in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted" (Heb. 2:17, 18).

* * *

The next point, beginning chapter 3, is the great superiority of Christ over Moses. Only a greater than Moses could put away the Law of Moses.

Paul does not belittle Moses. Moses indeed was the one great outstanding *servant*: but Christ the very Son and Heir.

Again he diverts (v. 7 to end) to solemn warning. The whole nation honored Moses, but consider what happened to the very generation who lived in the immediate presence of Moses—*They all perished in the wilderness for unbelief.* "Take heed," says the apostle (v. 12), "lest there be in YOU an evil heart of unbelief."

Is such a blunt warning—of *UNBELIEF*—applicable to professed *BELIEVERS*, as his hearers were? What is an "evil heart of unbelief," that such could *unknowingly* possess it? It is a heart which—though witnessing and recognizing the works of God—is still not softened and transformed by them.

Anyone "in" the Truth, whose life and character is not dominated by the Truth, is a victim of this "evil heart of unbelief" against which Paul fervently warns the Hebrew brethren.

Israel were "in" Moses, but they had not the spirit of Moses. Paul calls it being "*hardened*"—made dull and unresponsive to spiritual things—"*by the deceitfulness of sin.*"

* * *

Chapter 4 continues—

"Let us FEAR lest any of you should be judged to have come short of gaining the promised rest" (v. 1).

Not the fear of *terror*, but a healthy *concern* and constant awareness of the danger of failure—the deceitfulness of sin.

Out of this exhortation the apostle develops the demonstration that the inheritance under Joshua was by no means the Eternal Rest that God has planned. He is trying, point by point, to get them to comprehend that God's great purpose in Christ is immeasurably vaster than the shadowy limitations of the temporary Mosaic constitution.

Thought of the failure of Israel again turns him to exhortation (v. 11). He warns them that nothing is hid from the all-discerning eye of God, piercing to the very depths of the heart, unerringly dividing between soul and spirit—that is, between that which is *fleshly* and that which is *spiritual*.

In the final verse he reverts to encouragement. Knowing these things, let us come unreservedly (*"boldly"* is not a good word)—come unreservedly—come with the reverent confidence of true love—to the throne of grace, seeking help and mercy through an all-understanding Mediator that God Himself has lovingly provided. The fearful glory of divinity frightened many away from Christ, but the twelve disciples, though equally over-awed, said—

"To whom else shall we go for eternal life?" (Jn. 6:68).

* * *

Chapter 5 speaks of high priests. They are taken from among men (vs. 1-2) so they may have compassion; as men they must offer for themselves (v. 3); and they must be appointed by God (v. 4).

He has already demonstrated the first two points concerning Christ, in explaining his weakness and death. He now introduces a very important scriptural link in his chain of proof—

"Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek"

(Psa. 110:4).

We know very little of Melchizedek. He appears but once, and very briefly. We have no record of anything he said, and only one thing he did. He is mentioned but once more, in the Psalm here quoted by Paul. *But he is Paul's key witness to the limitations of the Mosaic Law.*

Before considering Melchisedec, the apostle (vs. 7-9) again emphasizes that Christ had to learn by suffering and earn his exalted position by obedience.

He was striking at two deeply-rooted Jewish misconceptions—

(1) that weakness and suffering did not befit the Messiah and
(2) that God's blessing comes by special favor and not personal effort.

Then (v. 10) he again takes up Melchisedec. But immediately (v. 11) he is constrained to another solemn exhortation. He has much to say about Melchisedec, but he finds it very hard to explain to them, because they are *so undeveloped in spiritual understanding*.

"By this time," he says, "you yourselves should be teachers, but instead you need to be constantly re-schooled in the first principles" (v. 12). Let each of us ask himself—

"How long have I been in the Truth? How much progress have I made toward being able to teach others of the deep things of God?"

Do you spend your time on worldly matters, lightly brushing off these things by saying, "Oh, that's too deep for *me!*"—really meaning, "I AM TOO SHALLOW for that!"? What would Paul say to such?

* * *

"Therefore" (ch. 6) "let us leave the first principles and go on to perfection."

First principles and baptism are just the bare beginning. *Only those who make every effort to "go on" toward perfection of knowledge and character have hope of life.* Why is this so important? Verses 4-6—

"For it is impossible for those once enlightened, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, for they have crucified Christ afresh."

Where much is given, much will be expected. Where time and opportunity have been given for development, development will be called for.

"Falling away" does not necessarily mean open forsaking of the Truth, but—as he shows in verses 7-8—*"falling away" is failure to bring forth spiritual fruit* after the labors and blessings of God and Christ have been freely expended upon us.

Then again encouragement—

"But we are persuaded BETTER things of YOU" (v. 9).

They had failed so far to grow in the Truth, and he feared for their stability, but they *had* manifested great care for the brethren, and for this God would have greater patience with their backwardness.

Verses 13-19 emphasize the certainty of the promise, lest their faith should waver or grow dim. All their faith had once been in the Law. He was showing that the Law was waxing old and vanishing away.

What *then* was there secure and permanent in their Scriptures? He reminds them of the promise to Abraham, given long before the Law. Not only did God promise, but He confirmed the promise with an oath, making the ground of faith doubly sure.

Concluding this warning and exhortation on their dullness, in the last verse he leads back to Melchisedec.

* * *

Beginning chapter 7, he draws attention to Melchisedec's significant titles—FIRST, King of *Righteousness* and THEN, King of *Peace*. He stands in the record as a type of an everlasting Priest-King.

Here is a man obviously greater in position than their father Abraham, for he blessed Abraham in God's Name, and received tithes of him. He was greater than the Mosaic priesthood, for Levi—the father of that priesthood—paid tithes to the priest Melchisedec through Abraham.

But here is a point, verse 11, even more striking. *These two priesthoods cannot exist together.*

Under the Law, only Levites could be priests. But the Messiah was to be of Judah, and according to the Scriptures it is he who is to be supreme in the earth as a Melchisedec high priest. But he *couldn't* be a priest under the Mosaic Law. What then about the Law? IT MUST GO. There is no room for it.

In the rest of the chapter he lists five proofs that Christ is greater than the Law—

(1) verse 19, the Law made nothing perfect, it accomplished nothing eternal, it was just a marking-time arrangement;

(2) verse 20, Christ's priesthood was confirmed by God with an oath in Psa. 110:4—there was no confirming oath in the Aaronic priesthood;

(3) Aaron's priesthood was a continual succession of dying men, each serving briefly, then, dropping helplessly into the grave. This feature alone betrayed its powerlessness—but Christ's sacrifice brought him from the dead, and he lives eternally;

(4) the Mosaic priests must offer *repeated* sacrifices, showing that they accomplished nothing permanent—Christ made his offering but once, and by it forever destroyed sin's hold on him and opened the way of everlasting life;

(5) the Mosaic priests, as the Jews only too well knew, were frail, erring creatures—*our* High Priest has all power, knowledge and holiness, and is perfected forevermore.

When the eternal glory of Christ's priesthood is perceived, the shadowy ordinances of the Mosaic Law would be seen to drop down to their proper level.

The next point (ch. 8, v. 6 to end) concerns the covenant. God had said through Jeremiah (31:31-34)—

"The days will come when I will make a NEW covenant with Israel, NOT according to the covenant I made with their fathers when I brought them out of Egypt."

The conclusion is inescapable:—if there is to be a *new* and *different* covenant, then the old **MUST** pass away. Point by point Paul proves from the Jews' own Scriptures that *there* must be a change.

* * *

Chapter 9:1-5 describes the Mosaic Tabernacle. Verses 6-8 remind them that into the Most Holy part no one ever entered but the high priest, and he only once a year with elaborate ritual.

What did it all mean? It clearly meant that as long as the Mosaic service continued, access to the Holiest state was not open to man.

Is it *never* to be open? Can man *never* hope to get closer to God than allowed by the restrictions of the Mosaic ordinances? Thoughtful Jewish believers would see that *in this restrictiveness, the Law testified to its own need for removal out of the way.*

Verses 9-15 point out that the sacrifices of the Law could only purify the *flesh*, while the sacrifice of Christ could purify the *conscience* or heart.

Just how can Christ's sacrifice purify the heart, while the Law could not? Did not a man who intelligently and faithfully offered the required sacrifices obtain thereby a clear conscience and sense of reconciliation to God?

But Paul is distinguishing between fleshly ordinances and spiritual principles. The Law did not originate sacrifice. That began in Eden and from the beginning is inseparably connected with faith in Christ.

But the Law *did* originate the system of fleshly, legal purification that Paul mentions in v. 10. The Jew must distinguish between the original, universal provision from Eden, and the later-added ritual of the Law.

The Law, however, in all its parts, *did* beautifully typify and portray the redemption in Christ. This Paul shows in the remainder of the chapter. The Law *actually* itself purified

nothing; it simply proved the *need* for purification, enforced the *principle* of purification or making holy, and gave a representation of the *way* it would be done.

In verses 22-23 is shown by the Law that it is a divine principle that all sin and defilement must be purified by blood. He has already proved the Law did not actually *accomplish* this, but just *symbolized* it—so Christ's sacrificial death is shown even by the Law itself to be essential to the purpose of God.

* * *

Beginning chapter 10, Paul reverts to purifying of the conscience, and the thought is carried deeper. *This chapter draws the contrast between sacrificial ORDINANCES and sacrificial LIVING.*

How many of Israel, down through the centuries, recognized what was necessary to give sacrifice any real *meaning*? We know there were *some*, but the vast majority were quite satisfied to go no deeper than the forms and externals.

But as Paul approaches the conclusion of his comparison of Christ with the Law, he shows clearly that *the only acceptable sacrifice is doing the will of God*; and that Christ, and he alone, has made the perfect offering.

God has no interest in ritual. He is concerned with *reality*. When He ordains ritual, it must be done with intelligent comprehension and a sincere inward fulfillment of that which the ritual symbolizes. God is not interested in sins just *typically* put away—they must be ACTUALLY put away.

The next point (vs. 19-31) is a related thought. The constant repetition of the Law dulled the sense of urgency and finality. There could always be another sacrifice made tomorrow.

But Christ's offering was *once*—and once ONLY. God is not mocked. Verse 26 is among the most serious warnings in all Scripture—

"If we sin WILFULLY after we receive the knowledge of the Truth, THERE REMAINETH NO MORE SACRIFICE FOR SINS."

It is not for us to say in any particular case where that point lies.

But we know God has never, and will never, tolerate being treated carelessly or presumed upon. He is very jealous for His Word. To uphold His holy Word He gave His own Son to terrible suffering and death.

There is much plain instruction in that Word as to our way of life. LET US NOT TREAT ONE LETTER OF IT LIGHTLY!

After the very strong wording ending in verse 31, the apostle turns immediately again to encouragement. He reminds them of how joyfully and fearlessly they had served and suffered in their original zeal—

“Ye took JOYFULLY the spoiling of your goods” (v. 34).

How many of US would do the same? *Zeal makes all hardship easy, and gives inward joy and peace in the midst of outward suffering.* He continues—

“Ye have need of patience” (v. 36).

Their zeal has been so keen, but the slow, grinding, march of time is very hard on zeal, especially if there is not a deep, well-rooted understanding.

* * *

So the apostle spreads before them the great panorama of Faith that we find in chapter 11. This would be a very stirring picture to the Jew. The inspiring story of all their great national heroes—men and women of faith who resolutely overcame every form of hardship and obstacle. *Compare the empty, fleshly heroes of any other nation with this noble list!*

Truly the apostle well describes them all when he says: *“Of whom the world was not worthy”* (v. 38). Marvellous, exceptional, godly characters standing out from the great human mass of ignorance, selfishness and fear.

* * *

In view of this (chapter 12:1)—

“Let us run with patience the race set before US.”

Let us keep our mind's eye centered on this faithful group, and particularly on the greatest of them all—the one who gives meaning and value to their struggles, for without him all their noble self-sacrifice could have wrought no lasting benefit.

These people are the REAL inhabitants of the earth. They ever surround us as a cloud. The people that we meet in our natural course and see with our natural eyes are but passing, meaningless shadows. Nothing in the present matters very much. All natural flesh is only grass, but to God all *these* live, and will live, eternally.

Having put this picture vividly before them, he strengthens its effect with a gentle reminder of the divine purpose and necessity of their trials—

“Ye have forgotten the exhortation—My son, despise not thou the disciplining of the Lord, for whom He loveth, He disciplined” (vs. 5, 6).

What useless and unlovely things are children who are not wisely disciplined! Paul says (v. 10) that the purpose of chastening is to develop holiness and (v. 14) that without holiness no man shall see the Lord. He tells them to examine themselves carefully as to this.

Holiness is spiritual-mindedness—*being interested in spiritual things and controlled by spiritual motives.*

He reminds them of Esau—a member of the chosen family, but unable to recognize spiritual values or rise above fleshly things.

He sold his glorious, divine birthright for a mess of pottage, and then—so humanly—cried bitterly to get it back again when it was too late!

In the rest of the chapter, the apostle compares the Mosaic and Christian dispensations, showing how much more select and exalted is the latter—

“Ye are not come to the mount that might be touched—to darkness and tempest—but ye are come unto the assembly of firstborns enrolled in the heavens, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect.”

Could they not PERCEIVE that they had come out of the Mosaic shadows into the glorious light of Christ?

* * *

Chapter 13 begins with miscellaneous admonitions.

“Let brotherly love continue” (v. 1).

“Be as concerned about those in trouble as if it were yourself” (v. 3).

“Let your manner of life be without covetousness—be content with what you have” (v. 5).

That is the mind of the Spirit. The mind of the flesh tends to a strutting parade of self-adornment and self-gratification, selfish, unfaithful stewardship, destined for a bitter ending.

Verses 10-15 very gently present the climax of his message to the Jews—

“WE have an altar whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle . . . let us therefore go forth unto him WITHOUT THE CAMP, bearing his reproach” (verses 10, 13).

The great break with Judaism. He reminds them that the greatest sacrifice of the Law, that sacrifice which atoned for the sanctuary itself, *could not be eaten by the priests*—could not be partaken of under the Law—it must be taken and burned OUTSIDE THE CAMP.

Herein is shown, by the Law itself, that the Law and the priesthood must at last be left behind. This closing thought he leaves with them—going with Jesus, the great sanctuary-cleansing sacrifice, OUTSIDE THE CAMP.

It has a wider application to us all. We too must go out with him, leaving all else behind. For we have here no continuing city—nothing permanent, nothing of any value, nothing real—only the vain shadows of a tottering, dying order—

“The fashion of this world passeth away” (1 Cor. 7:31).

And he concludes—

“May the God of peace 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” (Heb. 13:20, 21).

He WILL do this—if we will leave all, and follow him.

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