

The New Life

by John Marshall

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PREFACE

THIS is a book about "The new and living way" which holds, for the faithful believer, the promise of such great glory.

The new life is appointed for those who are termed, by the Apostle Paul, "new creatures" who are born of God by the blood of Jesus and whose nature "is created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness".

It is a life which is vastly different from the warp of the world, and in the chapters which follow the author attempts to define and to make clear in practical terms most of the issues that confront the children of God in their dealings with one another and with the world.

It is hoped that readers, generally, will find profit and pleasure in reviewing once again the foundations of their spiritual life; and that those who are preparing for baptism or have just been baptized, will find the kind of help and encouragement that will enable them to face the responsibilities of the new life, as well as realizing its greatness.

A detailed table of contents has been provided for ease of reference to particular topics.
I am indebted to Brother C. Cooper for some helpful suggestions for the improvement of certain chapters.

J.M.

Chapter 1 FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT

IN THE inspiring first chapter of his epistle to the Ephesians the Apostle Paul writes of the origin, the status, the glory and the future inheritance of the saints, whom he later describes as "children of light". Then as if to bring home to every believer the wonder of his salvation, he begins chapter 2: "And you did he quicken, when ye were dead through your trespasses and sins."

The World of Darkness

It is only by realizing the nature of the world of "trespasses and sins" that we can appreciate the worth of Christ's sacrifice in redeeming or freeing us from it. And we must look at this world through God's eyes, with the help of His word, and not through our own. Once we do this we shall understand how desperate is the state of those who remain in it even if they be relatives and friends.

When Jesus first came John recorded that "the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness apprehended it not", and thus it has ever been.

To be rescued from this world of darkness men must respond with more than a highly moral life: they have to come to God in belief and with an act of faith. "He that doeth truth cometh to the light that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God."

Paul makes clear that those who are in this world of darkness walk according to "the evil ways of this present age": they are the victims of the thinking and the mode of living of their age. This is particularly true today, when there are so many "modern" views of religion, of God, and of superman. This is emphasized in a powerful figure of speech which Paul uses when he describes the people of the world walking "according to the prince of the power of the air": they breathe the atmosphere of the trespasses and sins of their age; they are under the influence of the unseen power of evil which saps their lives until they are overcome by the death in which there is no thought and no hope. How realistically and tragically true this is of our own age!

As judge of all Jesus judged the "prince" of this dark world whose people, he said "believe not on me"; and Paul described "the prince of the power of the air" as "the spirit that now worketh in the sons of disobedience". That is the effect of this spirit of evil; it makes people disobedient to God' it makes them ignore Him in order to go their own way 'This was the sin of Israel, and it is the sin of the world today. God sees all this and any who will not come out of the world to the light die in darkness, for as it is said: "He that believeth not (R.V. obeyeth not) the son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."

The World of Light

Jesus came as the light of the world in order to create more light to illumine the darkness, and to his followers he said: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Thus the believer enters not only into a new life of fellowship but a life full of light. But it has its responsibilities and its difficulties, for we may have left in the dark world many friends whom we esteem, some for whom we may feel great affection.

Our personal judgments in these matters, however, must be tempered by light, not by darkness. Too often we are prone to make our judgments on purely personal and not on spiritual grounds. To say that a friend in the world leads a good Christian life because he (or she) leads a strongly moral life is to base one's judgment on man's view and not on God's.

It is this judgment "of the flesh" that sometimes leads a brother or sister to marry out of the Faith. The assumption is that he (or she) "leads as good a life as I do". It is forgotten that a "good" life must also be an obedient one to God.

Paul will have none of this kind of reasoning: he is straightforward and blunt in what he writes: "Do not unite yourselves with unbelievers; they are not fit mates for you. What has righteousness to do with wickedness? Can light consort with darkness? Can Christ agree with Belial, or a believer join hands with an unbeliever?"

This may seem to be a "hard saying" but this is how God sees, and reveals to His servants, the situation of those in the world. Thus there is all the more reason why young (and older) brethren and sisters should let their light shine strongly in all circumstances, and right at the beginning of any friendship. The power of light can achieve

wonderful results. And God does care for His own. But we must always face courageously the implications of our call. Ultimately undue friendship with the world is unfaithfulness to God. James calls it "adultery".

In the new life we have to face sacrifice, and at times the cost may be heavy, but has it ever been otherwise? It has been so from the murder of Abel to the blood of Christ: and still it goes on. It was because of the joy that was set before him that Jesus endured; and it is for the same joy that we must take up (carry) our own crosses and follow him.

The gulf between the worlds of darkness and of light is broad; the distance was made clear by Jesus: "He that believeth on him (the Son) is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." There is nothing superficial about the word "believe": it means "to adhere to", "to trust in", and "to rely on".

The World of Grace

When Yahweh revealed His glory to Moses He did so not with a mighty act of power, but with a revelation of the quality of His goodness in his compassion, grace, mercy and truth. If it had not been for the goodness of the Father to-wards us, in His loving grace, we would have remained in the world of darkness to vanish into endless death.

How fervently, then, should we rejoice that we live under the gracious favour, the divine charm of the Father; and how vigorously we should "testify the Gospel of the grace of God" for which the Apostle Paul sacrificed himself. In the world are relatives, friends and a host of others to whom we should reveal, by word and deed, this wonderful "gospel of the grace of God" and we should never cease in our efforts to win them to the Faith and to the hope of the life immortal. In making this effort we must never become weak enough to yield to their worldly influence, however well meaning they may be, for we may, imperceptibly, lose the light that is in us, and bring upon ourselves the more severe judgment of Jesus.

Every day of our lives ought to be a day of thanks: "For the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us, to the intent that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts we should live soberly, and righteously and godly in this present world; looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ."

We are living in the last days of Gentile times: an age which ought to give us a heightened and deepened sense of the inexpressible and irreplaceable value of the Truth we hold, and the preciousness of every moment that remains before the coming of Jesus.

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References

John 1v5, John 3v21, Eph 2v2, John 3v36, Matt 5v16, John 3v18, Exod 34v6, Acts 20v24, Titus 2v12-13 RSV

Chapter 2 BEING BORN AGAIN

G. H. Lang once asked a Greek what the word baptizo meant today. Pointing to a ship, he said: "If that ship were to sink completely beneath the water, we should say that it had been 'baptized'." When he was asked if baptizo would also be used were some drops of water to be sprinkled on the ship, he replied: "No; for that we should use the word rhantizo." This is the word that is used in the New Testament for sprinkling.

When we read that after his baptism "to fulfil all righteousness" Jesus "came up out of the water" and that Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch "went down both into the water" we see there were no doubts then what baptism meant, or about its vital necessity. But what is more important than the form of the baptism is its significance which Paul makes very clear: "Are ye ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him through baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father so we also might walk in newness of life."

The agony of the crucifixion of Jesus, the darkness of death, the morn of resurrection have to be figured in the solemnity of the moment of the death of the Adamic man, and the joy of the resurrection of the Christ-man who rises from the waters of baptism. Thus, unless we are baptized there is no "washing away of sins", no "washing of regeneration", no "answer of a good conscience toward God", and no valid transition from the old to the new life.

The Only Way

Baptism then is a must of scripture: it is a figurative rite that we dare not evade if we seek life; it is one of the seven pillars of doctrinal wisdom and the guarantee of the inheritance of what God has promised to the faithful: "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ. There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free, there can be no male and female; for ye are all one man in Christ Jesus. And if ye are Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise."

Once we have been "resurrected" to the new life we accept its obligations and responsibilities as well as its glories; we begin a regime of self-discipline and transformation of character that will, in time, make us servants more obedient to the will of our Father. Even Jesus "learned obedience by the things which he suffered". Woe betide us if we become neglectful in meeting our responsibilities, for through baptism we become "the temple of God" in whom dwells the spirit of God and "If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are".

References

Heb 9v13,19,21, Heb 10v22, Mark 1v10, Acts 8v38, Rom 6v3-4, Acts 22v16, Titus 3-5, 1 Peter 3v21
See Churches of God, by G. H. Lang, page 48.
Eph 4v5, Gal 3v27-29 RV, Heb 5v8, 1 Cor 3v16-17

Chapter 3 BECOMING PART OF THE BODY OF Christ

WHEN one repents of sin, "believes on the Lord Jesus Christ" and is reborn through water and spirit "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God". Such a process is no mere local affair on earth and cause for satisfaction, but brings a community of rejoicing among the mortal and immortal hosts who witness the conversion of another sinner who, with a contrite heart, has turned to God to wait on Him in faithful service.

The reason for this joy is not only the repentance of the sinner, but the adoption of one more child of God to increase His glory, to magnify His name and to bring nearer the day when "the full number of the Gentiles are come in, and so all Israel will be saved" -the natural and the spiritual. Thus repentance and rebirth are great events in the life of the sinner and of the whole family of God.

What should particularly humble the one who is reborn is that this comes about "according to the good pleasure of God's will" and if the believer is faithful to the divine call he is destined to the honour of joint inheritance of the kingdom with Jesus and to the ultimate and inexpressible glory of becoming part of the "all in all" of God.

The One Body

The family of God to which the newborn son belongs "has many members" yet, as Paul shows, it is "one body" which has Jesus as its appointed head. In this divine family there are people of diverse personalities and temperaments; of widely differing abilities, education and culture. It has always been the same. Jesus drew to him not only the poor but the rich, not only the illiterate but the cultured, not only nonentities but rulers. And all have to be transformed into the divine image so that they become a unity of faith, character and service. To illustrate the nature of this unity Paul uses the analogy of the human body, with its multitude of parts and functions all directed to preserving the efficiency and health of the body as a whole, and we understand the force of his illustration.

The little finger is a very small and seemingly insignificant part of the whole, but how destructively would the balance and functions of the hand be disturbed if it were lost! The simplest and humblest member of an ecclesia might seem quite unimportant beside so many who play a public part in ecclesial We, yet if he has faithfully fulfilled his spiritual part how much he is missed when he has gone!

Paul shows quite clearly that every part of a healthy body is vital to its proper functioning: "The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee: or again the head to the feet, I have no need of you." In this family everyone counts, everyone is necessary to an ecclesia and everyone should have, or find a job to do which will contribute to the spiritual health of its individual members.

This is & family and each member of it has to get to know and to understand the others. There has to develop a community of sympathy so that it can truly be said: "Whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.

The Practical Application

This one body, this family of God is so important that the name "Christadelphian" should not mislead us into a false concept of spiritual values by giving too much importance to the name which is but a convenient label. Rather we should remember that the body is "the house of God which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" -the support and bulwark of the truth.

God has chosen each believer without partiality, without respect of persons, and no one should ever, in human pride of place or status, forget this, because the ecclesia is the witness to the world of God's eternal wisdom and purposes, and each member of it should be worthy of its majestic role. In the first of three parables covering the life and work of the believer Jesus put service to the household first. He said that a "faithful and wise" servant was one whom his lord set over his household to give them their meat in due season (R.V.).

Who is the servant who is set over, or made to rule, in the lord's household? Are we meant to assume that these are the elders or the leaders in an ecclesia? That is not necessarily the kind of rulership that Jesus meant: "Whosoever would become first among you shall be your servant: even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."

During the last supper Jesus gave his followers the greatest example of this principle of service when he knelt before his disciples and washed their feet: "Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet.

Becoming part of the body of Christ means placing one-self at the disposal of the family to serve it in any way, however menial the task, without respect of persons or choice of work.

The second important principle which Jesus reveals in the parable is that the "faithful and wise" servant provides the rest of the household its food at the proper time, that is whenever and wherever the ecclesia meets, and whenever and wherever the "servant" has the opportunity of providing nourishment for it. But what is the meat, the food to be provided? Jesus described it in this way: "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me and to accomplish his work."

The Will of God

The will of God includes unity in faith, or belief; fellowship -walking in light and purpose with one another, with the Father and with Jesus; and love, which is of God and must be expressed in deed and in truth. Thus through each believer the will of God should work as selflessly as it did through Jesus, for the benefit of the whole household. And this work cannot be confined to one section, but is the responsibility of all.

Young brethren can bring to an ecclesia idealism, enthusiasm, vigour and willingness to serve; young sisters can bring such charm, freshness and helpfulness to the atmosphere of meetings that they can lead an ecclesia to feel that whilst Jesus is absent its future life and activities are assured. The more mature, with their greater spiritual wisdom and experience, should be able to understand and to know how best to use the energies and abilities of the young in the ecclesia.

Upon all rests the care of the ecclesia. Paul sometimes felt "the care of all the churches" press heavily upon him, but he never abandoned this responsibility. How could he? The ecclesia is cared for by God and by Jesus, and as part of the fellowship, or partnership with them, no one dare delegate his responsibility to someone else. Such care is vitally necessary so that there shall be "no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another".

When every member of the house of God realizes the wonder of rebirth, the greatness of the divine call and the majesty of the ecclesia in witnessing to the love, life and truth of God, then, and then only, can the will of God have real meaning for him as he strives to fit himself perfectly into this divine family.

In the meantime Jesus "sits at God's right hand in the heavenly places far above all principality and power, and might, and dominion . . ." He waits for the decisive moment of his return and, as he did in the case of the seven ecclesias in Asia, he observes the progress or regress of every ecclesia and individual member of his body throughout the world. The judgment of the seven ecclesias was written down for us; ours will be passed upon us at the judgment seat of Christ. May we find a loving mercy in that day.

References

Acts 16v31, Luke 15,10, Gal 3v26 RV, Gal 4v5, Rom 11v25 RSV, Eph 1v5,9, 1 Cor 12v12, Eph 4v4, Col 1v18, 1 Cor 12v21, 1 Cor 12v26, 1 Tim 3v15, Matt 24v45, Matt 20v27 RV, John 13v12-14, John 4v34, Eph 4v4, 1 John 1v3, 1 John 3v18, 1 John 4v16, 1 Cor 12v25-26, Eph 1v20-21

Chapter 4 THE BREAKING OF BREAD

THE one body, which is the ecclesia of Christ, depends on its head for its food: he is its bread of life, and no member of the body can live without it. Jesus made this quite clear when he said: "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you." Without this regular food one would wither and die spiritually.

In trying to get across his teaching to the Jews, Jesus contrasted the bread of life which God had provided in him with the manna which the children of Israel ate in the wilderness. Although the manna was miraculously provided it had no lasting value; its benefits were but temporary. But the Christ-bread is a life-giving food of lasting benefit: "This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever."

Jesus gave substance and permanence to this spiritual teaching of himself as the bread of life by his institution of the bread and wine as emblems to represent his body and his blood. Thus he could say: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day."

There could hardly be a more important teaching than this nor a stronger exhortation to every member of the body to make certain that the flesh and blood of Jesus are a regular part of one's spiritual diet, in addition to the Spirit Word. It is difficult for us to realize today that some of the disciples who listened to Jesus were dumbfounded at this teaching. They found it such a hard saying that many of them "went back, and walked no more with him". There was some excuse for them, as Jesus had not yet died as the Lamb of God so that they could understand the significance of his words.

Even the twelve found it a hard saying, but they were made of more trusting stuff than the many who turned away because when Jesus sadly asked: "Will ye also go away? Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life". Jesus is still the only one to whom the members of the body can turn, and through whom they have access to the Father.

The Memorial Service

We do right to describe each occasion of our feeding on the flesh and blood of Jesus as a Memorial Service, because it is rooted in another Memorial Service—the Passover feast; but one must not lose sight of the deeper significance which was pointed out by the apostle Paul: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the same loaf of Participation, fellowship, partnership, are all translated from the Greek word *koinonia*. So important is this participation that we must never miss a meal!

Like the first disciples who "upon the first day of the week . . . came together to break bread" we come together to participate in "the fellowship of his sufferings", to meditate upon the love of God, to seek comfort and strength, and to see our individual lives in their proper spiritual perspectives. Unless we do this regularly our spiritual strength can ebb away.

Our memorial service of the New Covenant arose out of the memorial service of the Old Covenant which began with the Passover of the natural Israel: "This day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast of the Lord throughout your generations . . . by an ordinance for ever." Ours is an ordinance which we are to keep until Christ returns.

It is interesting to see how the ordinance of the New Covenant for the spiritual Israel arose. Jesus, with the twelve, was in Jerusalem in the last week of his ministry in order to observe the Passover feast. We are told: "Then came the day of unleavened bread when the passover must be killed. And he sent Peter and John, saying, Go and prepare us the passover, that we may eat."

The Passover Feast

Before a lamb was sacrificed it was necessary for the priests to confirm that it was without blemish. It would have been taken to them for this purpose two or three days before. God, the Father, and Pilate, the judge, confirmed

the unblemished character of Jesus, before he was sacrificed as "the Lamb of God". On the day of the feast someone would have been appointed to slay the lamb and the blood would have been sprinkled and poured before the altar by a priest. Peter wrote of the elect who are sanctified, "unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ."

In the slaying of the animal, the removal of the prescribed parts by the priests and the cooking of the carcass which would have been handed back by the priests for this purpose everything would have been done to make sure that no bone would be broken. Of the crucifixion of Jesus, John records: "For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken. "

Jesus gave Peter and John instructions as to where they were to prepare the feast, and their first duty, unless it had already been done by the householder, would have been to verify that no leaven of any kind was left in the house: only unleavened bread was to be eaten for seven days. Paul writes of its spiritual application in this way: "Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with the old leaven neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

The figurative way in which Paul refers to leaven, and to unleavened bread, shows that there is no compulsion on us today to use one or other at our Memorial feast. It is for an ecclesia to decide.

The Bread and the Wine

The feast usually followed a fixed order and lasted about three to four hours. On this night every Jew had to drink four cups of wine even "though he were to receive money for it from the poor box". Everyone at table was provided with a separate cup filled with wine and the proceedings began with the drinking of this cup after the pronouncement of a blessing.

After a washing of hands, there was the breaking of bread. On the Sabbath two loaves were placed on the table in memory of the double measure of manna gathered on the Friday. On Passover night three loaves were provided. The middle loaf was broken into two parts, the larger part to be kept to be eaten at the end of supper. The smaller part was divided and eaten as "the bread of affliction which our forefathers ate in the land of Egypt". Of Jesus, Paul wrote: "I rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is lacking (A. V. behind) of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake which is the church." Jesus, when he broke the bread said, in effect, whenever you break bread in future, do it, not in remembrance of bondage, but "in remembrance of me".

In accordance with Exod. 13: 8, a father told his son, or the head of the feast recited for the gathering, the reason for the feast, after which there was a recital of the first part of the Hallel (Psalms 113-114). Then was drunk the second cup of wine called the "cup of Haggadah" or "Proclaiming". Paul referring to this said, "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink the cup, ye proclaim the Lord's death till he come". Thus the showing forth, or relating of the events of Egypt, give way to the showing forth, or relating of the events of the sacrifice of Christ.

Now came a second washing of hands before the meal and it was probably at this stage that Jesus "knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands" knelt, to wash not the disciples' hands but their feet, in order to give them "an example, that ye also should do as I have done to you".

The Sop

The meal proper began with a kind of hors-d'oeuvre called haroseth, which was composed of figs, nuts, dates, pomegranates, apples, almonds, cinnamon and ginger. When thoroughly mixed it had a clayey appearance which reminded eaters of the clay with which their ancestors had to make bricks. The crushed cinnamon bark or tube reminded them of the straw which they had to mix with the clay.

In memory of the bitterness of the Egyptian persecution each guest took two pieces of bread between which was placed a bitter herb and this was dipped into the haroseth and eaten. The dish was passed round time and again if necessary, so that each could dip his own "sop" into the dish.

From the records of Matthew, Mark and John we are able to piece together what happened at the feast presided over by Jesus. Judas must have been sitting near enough for Jesus to place his sop in the dish the same time as Judas thus to identify his betrayer. Matthew and Mark record Jesus as saying: "He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish shall betray me." John records an additional detail: "He it is to whom I shall give a sop when I have

dipped it. Thus Jesus not only dipped his bread into the dish the same time as Judas, but offered it to him as "a covenant of bread", as a token of friendship, and provided a last opportunity for Judas to repent of his intended betrayal of his Lord.

Judas was not to be moved in his resolve of the Psalmist, "He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me" was to be fulfilled. Jesus recognised this resolve in Judas and said to him: "That thou doest, do quickly."

The Cup of Blessing

John records that Judas "having received the sop went immediately out: and it was night".- This meant that he was there neither for the eating of the main passover meal nor for the institution of the new covenant represented by the bread which was eaten after the meal, and the third cup of which was "the cup of blessing", so called because the blessing or grace after the meal was pronounced upon it. It is possibly this third cup that Paul referred to when he wrote: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?"

Luke's record suggests that Judas was present at the drinking of the wine and the breaking of bread. The two records can be reconciled if it is assumed that throughout the service of the four drinkings of wine and the several breakings of bread Jesus referred to their relationship to his sacrifice. Judas would then have been present when Jesus earlier referred to them.

The departure of Judas on his treacherous mission led Jesus to say: "Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him", for soon he was literally to suffer the sacrifice that he was now, after the service dedicated to the old covenant, to symbolize in the emblems which he handed to the remaining disciples in token of the new covenant. Of the bread he said: "Take, eat, this is my body." And of the wine he said: "This is my blood of the new covenant which is shed for many."

The Closing Hymn

Before the service came to an end the Hallel, Psalms 115-118, and the Great Hallel, Psalm 136, were recited or sung and the fourth cup of wine was drunk. Matthew records: "And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives." The hymn was probably from the Hallel Psalms.

In company with the eleven, Jesus went to the garden of Gethsemane to wait for the coming of Judas "with a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and the scribes and the elders". Then began the processes that were to result in the crucifixion, and were to bring upon the leaders, the people and their children not only "the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of the righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias..." but the blood of the only begotten Son of God. None could erase the memorial feast which Jesus left for all generations of his disciples.

How vital it is, then, that every believer neglects no opportunity of breaking of bread and drinking wine in memory of Christ, our Passover, and as a reminder of that moment when he said: "I will not drink henceforth of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

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Chapter 5 COUNTING THE COST

FEW ever forget the deep emotions that were stirred as they passed, in the waters of baptism, from death to the new life. But sometimes we forget that the new life is a vastly different life, and that we can return to old habits and desires only at the peril of losing eternal life.

The new life means that we have completely to forsake former pleasures, aims, ambitions and associations if they are likely to hinder our spiritual progress. We have to be realistic in facing and accepting the consequences of our act of faith. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me", said Jesus.

The void created by self-denial is filled by obedience to the command of Jesus: "Follow me." Whilst *akolouthen* was the common Greek word for follow, on occasions it was used to describe the complete, absolute obedience to a leader; thus it was used of a soldier implicitly following, or carrying out his Captain's orders; or of a slave's duty to his master; or a citizen's implicit obedience to the laws of a State. This is the sense in which Jesus used the word follow: unquestioning obedience to his commands.

A Realistic Valuation

Jesus requires wise men to count the cost of the new life, so that they will understand the responsibilities of his call. He illustrated this in a realistic fashion by giving the multitude who listened to him two examples: first the wisdom of the builder who worked out what material he would require to build, and to finish, a tower and how much it would cost; then he pointed out how foolish a man would appear to his neighbours if he proceeded to build without calculating the cost, and was unable to finish it. His second example concerned a king going to war who is wise enough to get to know the strength of the enemy forces, so that if he finds they are too strong for him he can send an ambassador to sue for peace.

There could hardly be more pointed illustrations for us. But would it be true to say of each of us that we have realistically counted the cost of the new life we live? Or do we so aimlessly pursue the spiritual life that at the judgment seat we shall be forced to confess that we have failed to finish the work given us, and never attempted to find out the strength of the enemy we have to face?

Let Jesus help us to begin calculating the cost: "If any man come to me, and hate not his father and mother and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple."³ This is a hard saying! Can one hate so completely? Sacrifice, yes, but of this kind?

The explanation of this verse is to be found in the varied uses in Bible language of the word to "hate". Sometimes it is used as a contrast to love; at other times it is of hate in its fullest sense, such as hatred of all that is evil and vile; but the word is also used to indicate a choice or a preference, and that is the way Jesus used it in this verse: "If you prefer your father and mother . . . above me, you cannot be my disciple." He said something like this to the twelve just before he sent them on a mission: "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."

Jesus always meant what he said; he never wasted words. Always, he must be put first. We are not being asked to love our families less; we are asked to love him more. But if any member of one's family stands between the believer and Jesus, and hinders him from truly following Jesus, there should be no doubt where one's loyalty should lie. Loyalty to the family above Christ means death; loyalty to Christ above the family means life everlasting.

This process of counting the cost is not very comfortable, is it? But one must face spiritual realities, for if one does, it will be seen that any sacrifice made for Jesus is not pointless, but is merely the price of eternal glory. We cannot expect to enjoy the best of the natural and the spiritual life.

Spiritual Crises

There are times when one is suddenly faced with a spiritual crisis. An invitation to become a member of some such association as the Freemasons seems attractive. It involves opportunity to do good works, and the promise of benefit to one's vocation; the offer seems harmless enough. Or life is flowing easily and prosperously, and one is popular with one's business colleagues, but because of an international crisis, and the imposition of

conscription, one is forced to admit that one is a conscientious objector. Is the admission easy or difficult? Or suddenly one has to decide to marry, or not to marry, one who is not of our faith. Or slowly and inexorably trouble between husband and wife so develops that the startling thought of divorce creeps into the mind of one or of both.

These, and others, are crises of tremendous emotional consequence. And too often one thinks of them as personal issues having little to do with Jesus or the household of faith. There never was a greater mistake. Not one of these or other issues can be separated from Jesus and his command to follow him. Each of them is a test of the quality of our obedience to him. And each is a part of the calculation of counting the cost.

Take Freemasonry, for example. Even apart from questions of what Masonry involves in belief and ritual, could a brother who is busily occupied with the work of Jesus in the household (as he ought to be) and in the preaching of the gospel in some way or other (as he ought to be) really consider active service to a Masonic or other kind of Lodge? Is it possible successfully to serve two masters? Jesus did not think so, "for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other". Again it is a question of preference. There are those who have held office in a Freemason's Lodge who left to serve a greater Master.

Counting the cost may sometimes face one, in reality, with the issue of life and death. In countries where liberty of conscience is provided for, the restrictions placed upon conscientious objectors have not been great: a change of employment, sometimes imprisonment, little more. But to the young German brother during World War II the matter was far more serious. He faced his situation resolutely and uncomplainingly and he counted the cost. Had not his Lord said, "He that loseth his life for my sake shall find it?"

To this courageous young brother there could be no compromise. It was Jesus who said: "If my Kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence."

His followers were to use weapons very different from those of the world: the "staff" of peace in their preaching, and "the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God". This was the lesson he taught his disciples when the impulsive Peter used a sword to strike off the ear of the high priest's servant. Jesus said: "Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword."

We have only one leader, the Captain of our Salvation, and we can obey no other.

A Hard Decision

One of the most difficult and emotional crises in one's life is felt the more strongly because it happens when one is young and feels everything so deeply. What is to be done about an attachment to someone who continues to have no interest in the Truth? Was one's attachment to Jesus and the Truth made clear from the start? Or was there a separation of one's "private" life from Jesus? Remember what Jesus said about loving someone more than him?

There are only two states of existence before God: the flesh and the spirit, darkness and light, death and life. The unbeliever walks "according to the course of this world . . . according to the spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience . . . fulfilling the desires of the flesh . . . and are by nature the children of wrath".

This is a truth which must be courageously faced. However good, in the worldly sense, however gentle or loving, the unbeliever is disobedient to God-and it is He who judges, not we ourselves. That is why Paul wrote: "Do not unite yourself with unbelievers; they are no fit mates for you. What has righteousness to do with wickedness? Can light consort with darkness? Can Christ agree with Belial or a believer join hands with an unbeliever! Can there be a compact between the temple of God and the idols of the heathen? And the temple of the Living God is what we are."

Are you hurt by all this? Do you find suddenly that counting the cost is a harder proposition than you expected? Do you think that you can enter the kingdom on your own terms? It is hard; it does mean sacrifice. Often much heartache is avoided if one shows right from the start that no one and nothing counts above Jesus.

What of the tangled web of trouble into which a marriage sometimes gets? Again there is a tendency to look upon such problems as purely personal, and of no concern to Jesus. Why do we make such a terrible mistake? If

both partners are the children of God, they are His concern, and He cares. Is the trouble one of incompatibility of temperament? Then one or both have not been keeping their vows of faithfulness to the Father: have not been yielding to the transformation of character through the spirit word. Is it not possible to start again, with eyes wider open not only to the cost, but to the glory? If the trouble is more serious, prayer, and the help of understanding brethren and sisters, as early in the developing disagreement as possible, may help, for as Paul said, "we are members one of another."

Count the cost. Marriage is more than a union of the flesh: the husband is the figure of Christ, and the wife is the figure of the ecclesia. Can Christ and his ecclesia be separated, even in a figure, without spiritual disaster?

We are all at fault in that in this great issue of loyalty to the Father and to Jesus, we do not sincerely and deliberately count the cost, as Jesus did, and as the Apostle Paul did, who could write: "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ. . . that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings ... if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead." There is sadness and suffering in sacrifice, but there is also joy: Jesus is the glory that has come out of it, and he is our hope of glory in the Kingdom.

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Chapter 6 A DANGEROUS WORLD

THE world is a dangerous place to live and work in, particularly for young believers. Their eyes, ears and minds are assaulted by magazine, poster, radio and television advertisements which set out to stimulate the wrong kind of emotions by making sex, drink and the different ways of having "a good time" seem attractive and proper.

Where a young brother or sister has been brought up in a happy home in the "nurture and admonition of the Lord" the example of the parents, the friendships formed in ecclesial life and the strength of character developed as the result of this happy spiritual environment are usually sufficient to help them to withstand onslaughts on their moral and spiritual outlook. But there are dangers more subtle than these openly professed invitations to "good time" experiences. Young students going to an institute for further education, to a teacher or other training college, or to a university are suddenly parted from the security and wise restraints of home life and are absorbed into a society of young people who, released from school and home discipline, often express their new-found freedom not only in style of hair or dress, or rebellion against authority, but in more dangerous ways.

Each student, in addition to attendance at lectures, is attracted to social and group activities, and fortunate is the student who becomes part of a group which is level headed and anxious to make the most of opportunities for useful discussion and activities.

Smoking

Good as some of these groups can be, they can induce one to take up undesirable habits. They can start a brother or a sister on the way to becoming a confirmed smoker. Most people smoke, so it seems odd not to join in. There never was a flimsier reason than this for starting to smoke, nor would there be better evidence of weakness of character!

Apart from the expense which in relation to the income of the young can be considerable, there is no benefit in smoking. Every athlete, amateur or professional, who takes his pursuit seriously, is either a non-smoker or abstains while training for a special event. And it is now proven that smoking can cause lung cancer and contribute to other diseases.

The nicotine stain on one's fingers can be obliterated by a pumice stone or some such means, but the nicotine deposit can hardly be eradicated from one's lungs except by extended abstention and treatment. And so many smokers do not realize that they exemplify the uncleanness of the habit by the foulness of their breath! To smoke or not to smoke would probably never be decided by argument. Rather, one who lives in Christ has to ask, "Could I justify it to Jesus?" And can one do as Paul advised young Timothy: ". . . keep thyself pure" and smoke?

Alcohol

How easy it is, and with what a sense of comradeship (it seems) can one join one's friends in a group for a few drinks. Or to join them at an inn or a public house. What harm is there, provided one is temperate? Did not Paul advise the young Timothy to "use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine oft infirmities"?

The trouble with drinking is that it is not in the nature of the young, generally, to be temperate. And drink clouds the mind and one's judgment; it over-stimulates the senses and weakens self-control. A motor-car can be an instrument of death in the hands of someone who drinks to excess.

Dependent too on one's physical and mental constitution drink can arouse merriment in some and bad temper in others. The most violent quarrels sometimes occur in public houses, or "beer gardens".

Paul used a phrase which aptly described the weakness of will which can be caused by drinking: "Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess . . ." Young's Concordance gives the meaning of the word drunk (methusko) as "To begin to be softened!" J. B. Phillips translates the whole sentence: "Don't get your stimulus from wine (for there is always the danger of excessive drinking) but let the Spirit stimulate your souls." How much greater is such a spiritual stimulus and what great rewards arise from it!

It is not so much that we should never touch wine and the like, but the company, the place and the dangers must ever be in our minds. "Keep a watch on yourselves; do not let your minds be dulled by dissipation and

drunkenness and worldly cares so that the great Day closes upon you suddenly like a trap; for that day will come on all men, wherever they are, the whole world over. Be on the alert, praying at all times for strength to pass safely through all these imminent troubles and to stand in the presence of the Son of Man."

Sex

The dangers of the modern "permissive" world, for young brethren and sisters, were thrown into sharp relief by the suspension of a Dean of one of the constituent colleges of a University who suggested that bedrooms should be made available for men and women students who wanted to sleep together.

A prominent newspaper leader whilst deploring such extreme permissiveness observed: "But it should be equally evident that it is no use authorities nowadays trying to stamp out sex among their students ... A mixture of agnosticism and safe contraceptives has changed the sexual attitudes of many students and many dons... A generation ago the danger was that a student who had sexual relations should feel abnormal and unclean. Now it is the student who stays chaste who is more likely to be loaded with the neurotic burden of society's own sexual anxiety."

In this changing climate of student thought about sex, and the complete absence of any sense of sin among the young, it is all too easy, in the intimacy of college groups, and under the stimulation of a few drinks, for a young brother or sister to be enticed into promiscuous relationships. Such a disaster to one's spiritual life means either a break with the household of faith, or an overwhelming sense of sin and shame. This has actually happened, fortunately with a reformation that has been creditable and rewarding in the greatly increased activities for the Truth.

We would always hope that such cases would be rare; but where it does happen it should always be realized that the Father is abundant in mercy, and there is forgiveness for the truly repentant sinner.

What we need to remember is that we hold our bodies in trust for the Lord Jesus who bought us with his precious blood Paul was keenly aware of this when he wrote to the Corinthians- "The body is not meant for immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body."" If one prostitutes one's body to promiscuous relationships, how shall one feel when meeting the man or woman for whom, above all, one would wish to offer a pure body in marriage?

Our bodies are sacred to the use of our Father and the Lord Jesus, in this life and the life to come; therefore, says Paul- "Shun immorality. Every other sin which a man commits is outside his body; but the immoral man sins against His own body."

Finally comes a warning to every saint: "Be sure of this, that no immoral or impure man, or one that is covetous (that is, an idolater), has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God."

Drugs

Once people poured out their troubles in prayer, and this with the help of others, brought them relief. Peter showed the way "Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that in due time he may exalt you. Cast your anxieties on him, for he cares for you."

Now; many turn not to God but to drugs to alleviate worry sleeplessness and simple pain. A vast and powerful industry exists to satisfy the insatiable demand of the public throughout the world for pills that will give them relief from ailments caused by the worries and frustrations of daily living.

If taken at all drugs should be used under medical direction because even the barbiturate pills taken for sleeplessness can leave patients with a "cloudy" mind next morning And many car accidents have been caused by people taking bigger doses than the doctor ordered, or taking alcoholic drinks after doses.

It is a good rule that the saint should keep his body pure from smoking or excess drinking. And he should certainly keep his body clean of drugs either of the narcotic or stimulant types unless it be under proper medical attention.

The cure for many of our physical and nervous troubles lies in the development of a serene mind: a mind filled with the "peace" of Christ. Only liberal "doses" of the Word, during the day and at night when one is wakeful, will

achieve this, not drugs.

In such a drug accustomed world as ours, is it any wonder that foolish young people, scared of the violent world into which they have been born, and frightened of the spectre of the "mushroom cloud" which might destroy their future, should turn to drugs that will take them into a dream world? Unfortunately there is always the awakening to an even more terrible mental state as one becomes habituated to drugs.

What is not realized even by the habitual taker of "hard" drugs, is that he has set himself (or herself) on a course of moral, spiritual, and physical deterioration which may result in irreparable damage to the brain, lungs, liver, kidneys and bladder; or the victim can find himself suffering from asthma, serious palpitation, or even paralysis of the lower extremities.

The habit of youthful drug-taking often begins with the use of amphetamine ("pep") pills in order to give one confidence at examinations, to quicken one's thinking at interviews, or to "liven" one for some special social occasion. From these pills to "harder" drugs is an easy stage, particularly if one is in company with others who are eager to experiment.

Drug Reactions

One of the worst dangers of drugs is that different people react to them in different ways. A few "pep" pills have made some people feel over-confident and led them into silly actions. Others have become vicious and brutal, in a few cases to the extent of murder; whilst others have become so depressed by the pills as to commit suicide.

A drug which induces a dream world is LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide). Some doctors say that taken in moderate doses it can give confidence to a person-but which person? Illusions induced by this drug can lead to suicidal acts, as in the case of a twenty-two year old youth who jumped from the roof of a house under the illusion that he could fly. This is the kind of confidence no one wants. This drug has also caused complete and permanent mental breakdowns, and has resulted in the birth of malformed babies.

Cannabis (hashish or hemp) is another drug which was once chewed or smoked by people in Arabia, Egypt and Turkey, but now has become familiar, tragically, to youth of our western world. It is a drug for which one habituated to it will steal, or injure, or even, in the case of a woman, will offer her body for the money that will buy it.

All who are members of the body of Christ should be particularly wary of the dangers of the society in which they move. They should never respond to a "dare" to try a drug "just once", and they should always keep their curiosity about these things under strict discipline. And if circumstances make them become victims of anxiety and sleeplessness they should pray "without ceasing" as well as seeking the help of family or friends, and if necessary a doctor. Paul passed on his experiences in these words: "Don't worry over anything whatever; tell God every detail of your needs in earnest and thankful prayer." God really does care!

The Answer of Faith

You will remember that Paul, more than once, compared life to a race with laurels going to the winners, and we shall be wise if we constantly keep in mind what he says, because his figure of the athlete assumes bodies kept pure and fit for their strenuous effort of running to the end of the course. "Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable."

As to life in general and our attitude and behaviour to people in the world Paul was equally clear, and it is astonishing how relevant even to our "modern" age his advice is: "Adapt yourselves no longer to the pattern of this present world, but let your minds be remade and your whole nature thus transformed. Then you will be able to discern the will of God, and to know what is good, acceptable and perfect."

We have to work in the world, we may have to leave home for further study; wherever we find ourselves, and however young we may be, we are ministers of the Word, we are lights in the world, and by the very intensity of that light we shall expose the works of darkness. Because of the dangers it is our bounden duty "to keep ourselves unspotted from the world".

The world can be a cruel place; it is always our testing ground, but we have the assurance that if we are mindful of, and loyal to, our spiritual heritage we shall, with the Father's help conquer the world, for "whatsoever is born

of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that over-cometh the world, even our faith".

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Chapter 7 SERVING THE HOUSEHOLD

THERE is no honour, wealth or power on earth to equal the honour and spiritual treasure that every believer possesses. Formerly alienated as we were from the commonwealth of Israel, Paul says "ye that once were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ... for through him we both have our access in one spirit unto the Father. So then ye are no more strangers and sojourners, but ye are fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God."

The Household of Faith

Every honour implies a responsibility, and once a believer becomes a member of the divine household, he (or she) should be dedicated to its service. When Paul exhorted the Galatians that "as we have opportunity, let us work that which is good toward all men" he added, as a vital part of good works, "and especially toward them that are of the household of the faith".

In the new life one has to learn that the outstanding characteristic of this divine household is love, because God is love. It is no household of His where there is little or no love. On love of God and one's neighbour, or fellow man, says Jesus, "hang all the law and the prophets" ; and love must begin where God is, in His household.

If everyone who is born into the new life and the Lord's household is its servant, how should one serve it? First by realizing the depth of service that it is: "Hereby know we love, because he (Jesus) laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." This bears looking at and thinking over time and again- because this is rarely realized in practice. The offhand way in which we often ignore the welfare of our brethren makes a mockery of Christ's and our so-called sacrifices for the brethren.

The first service of every member of the household is to fulfil in practice our fellowship one with another, with God and with Jesus-making a reality of sharing a common faith and purpose; being partners together in working towards a divine-historical goal. To do this means to understand the capacities and limits not only of one's own personality, but also of others. Whilst salvation is an individual matter, fellowship could not be otherwise than a social one. There are often lonely, elderly and unwell members of the ecclesia who struggle to the meetings every Sunday and would welcome words of comfort and sympathy from those more happily placed. But they may be too busy with others, and the opportunity for expressing true fellowship is missed.

Spiritual Partners

It is easy to undertake a particular duty in the ecclesia; it is far from easy to get to know the brethren and sisters as spiritual partners; as those who also suffer difficulties and anxieties; as those who need sympathy and help; as those who respond and expand to love and care. These are the things that Peter had in mind when he wrote "Love the brotherhood", and that John was thinking about when he said: "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren,"

First things first, then-love, fellowship, partnership, good works to the brotherhood. And it is upon these things that all other activities should be founded, so that there will be neither partiality, nor hypocrisy, but a healthy spiritual unity of love which will issue in constant worship, praise and thanksgiving to the King of Glory who has opened for each of us such a wonderful door of hope!

Service begins at the door of the house, or the ecclesia, for the cheerful, smiling steward who welcomes brethren and sisters and any visitors to the meeting imparts a warmth of fellowship which is an important part of the atmosphere of each meeting. Add to this warmth punctuality in beginning one's duties, efficiency in carrying them out, a courteousness and helpfulness towards strangers who come for the public proclamation of the Truth, and these make up a devoted service to the household which is higher than the value generally given to it.

Someone has to perform such duties; they are not menial but are part of the worship, praise and devotion to the Lord of the whole household; and nothing should be too much trouble for Him! "I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness", said the Psalmist, for the rewards of such truly loving service are eternal.

"Thou Seest All"

Those members suited to the management of an ecclesia are usually quickly pressed into its service. Whatever

the duty, each should perform it "as unto the Lord". We may not always realize it but all are constantly under divine scrutiny in all that is said and done. "He that formed the ear, shall he not hear? He that formed the eye, shall he not see?" We are not enough aware that service, in whatever capacity, to the Father is a sacred service and ought never to be lightly esteemed or half-heartedly carried out.

There are a number of services to an ecclesia besides the more prominent ones. If there is some truth in the saying that "it is the poor that help the poor", it is also true that "it is the young that can help the young". And young married couples (and unmarried) can do much to preserve the spiritual health and welfare of the young people (baptized or otherwise) in the ecclesia by inviting them to their homes or by joining them in activities arranged through the ecclesia.

A Sunday School benefits enormously from the presence of a senior or discussion class composed of young married members and young people of fifteen years of age and upwards. A vigorous class of this kind can help to prevent the serious loss of scholars of 14-15 onwards which afflicts so many ecclesias. And almost every ecclesia is in need of Sunday School teachers.

The Divine Family

A mistake which is made by many brethren and sisters is to value one meeting above another. There is certainly some degree of difference between them, but it should not affect our response to them. What does need emphasizing is that each meeting is a particular function of the household or family of God.

On a Sunday morning the family recalls the sacrifice of its Lord; a sacrifice which he lovingly suffered for it. On a Sunday evening the family joins to witness to the power of his Name and Kingdom; and on a week-night it pursues its study of God's ways and purposes as revealed in His Word. In fact, the Bible class, especially in the case of young brethren and sisters, fulfils their need. Each meeting, then, should not be an individual choice, but a family pursuit which increases and enlivens the spirit of fellowship.

The fact that the largest attendance is on a Sunday morning and the lowest is at a mid-week Bible Class shows shocking partiality in our response to what should be a happy spiritual family expression of love and devotion to God's will and to one another. Paul urged young Timothy to "do nothing by partiality" and James wrote that the wisdom that is from above is "without partiality" and we all need to think very seriously not only about our attitude one to another, but to our meetings.

Bible Reading

One neglected service to our ecclesias is the reading of the scriptures which are rarely communicated with the clearness, understanding and conviction which their character merits.

We need to recapture something of "the fear of the Lord" and the honour and dignity of reading from the scriptures that Ezra encouraged in his day. When he "opened the book in the sight of all the people ... all the people stood up: and Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God". Do not the scriptures contain "great and precious promises" and ought we not to reverence it as the living word of "the great God"?

As well as the Levites, certain others were appointed to read the scriptures as "the people stood in their place. And they read in the book, in the law of God, distinctly; and they gave the sense, so that they understood the reading".

The daily readings at home, particularly if read aloud with sense and understanding, not only provide instruction but training for the honour of reading in His presence before the members of His household.

The Fellowship of Prayer

Another of the neglected services to an ecclesia is prayer. Just as the presiding brother ought to prepare beforehand for every aspect of his duties, including prayer, so everyone who is used to being called on for prayer should prepare for approach to Him who is the Most High God, and our Father. If there was the remotest possibility of one's having to appear before the Sovereign of one's country, would one go unprepared, without any attempt to think of what might be said?

In our anxiety for spontaneity in prayer we neglect to prepare our minds and our thoughts. We certainly have "boldness (free utterance) to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus". But free utterance of what? First, "to

worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness", then to give praise and thanks for what we so bountifully receive from His hands. Afterwards we may present our cares and petitions to Him.

There is so much fellowship and such a release of love to be enjoyed with the Father in prayer that it seems a pity to burden Him, as we often do, with little talks on what He has already revealed for our learning. The new life is a family life and it is in this divine household that we learn what love of God and of one another means. It is in this household that we learn compassion for one's fellow man; and it is here that we experience a spirit to be found nowhere else in the world, God-given fellowship which issues in a selfless service to others, resulting in forgetfulness of oneself and helping to assuage the hurt and pain of one's own troubles. It is in this household that the Christ-like character is forged and spiritual strength is found.

The Heavenly Jerusalem

Let all strive to serve the household of God faithfully for, says the writer to the Hebrews: "Ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable hosts of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant. . ." May each be worthy of the great honour which membership of this great family confers upon every one of us.

References

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Chapter 8 PREACHING THE GOSPEL

WHENEVER God chooses a people He not only satisfies them with the hope of glory but graces them with a ministry, a service, a work in His Name. Within a couple of months of their leaving Egypt He told Israel, through Moses: "Ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation." They were to minister God's name and holiness to the nations, so that His name would be honoured.

The Old Testament history of Israel shows how the people failed to uphold the honour of God until He declared: "They have even defiled my holy name by their abominations that they have committed: wherefore I have consumed them in mine anger."

An Elect Race

In spite of the overthrow of Israel and Judah, in spite of their sufferings as a people, they failed to learn any lesson from their experiences and when Jesus came to bring them renewed life and salvation they rejected him, calling upon themselves his judgment in the words: "Therefore I say unto you, the kingdom of God shall be taken from you and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof."

Thus did the adopted sons of God come into their own to be given the titles which Israel had previously borne; for, as Peter wrote: "Ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that ye may show forth the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light."

The saints now have the hope of glory, but they also have the task that Israel failed to fulfil, "to show forth" the Name, honour and purposes of God. They have to cry, to proclaim, to herald, to preach the good news of Christ and the kingdom of God, as well as the goodness of the loving Father. "The Lord is rich unto all that call upon him."

How Shall People Hear?

The Apostle Paul posed an ever-present problem in regard to the richness of the Lord's mercy towards people who would turn to Him: "How shall they hear without a preacher?" Who will proclaim to the people the wonder and the ways of God's love? Paul quotes Isaiah: "How beautiful are the feet of them that bring glad tidings of good things !" He does this not only to show how wonderful the task is, but that it is the duty of every child of God to proclaim this good news. Necessity was laid upon him, for as he wrote, "Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel !"

There is such wonder in our call that it would dishonour the love of God to withhold it from others. If, as Paul wrote, God raised up Pharaoh "that my name might be published abroad in all the earth", what does He expect of us, His saints "whom He has raised to heavenly places in Christ"?

The Father expects that His children will preserve the majesty and honour of His Name in all that they say and do. Paul gave examples of this when he exhorted that servants should count their masters worthy of honour "that the name of God and the doctrine be not blasphemed" ; and that young women should not only love their husbands and children but "be sober-minded, chaste, workers at home, kind, being in subjection to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed."

In humility, modesty and love, the goodness of God is portrayed in the lives of His children so that His honour is sustained and His mercies made manifest. This is the imitation of God which the Apostle exhorted in his epistle to the Ephesians.

The Wisdom and Knowledge of God

In our lives we preach or proclaim the wisdom and knowledge of God about which Paul became lyrical in his epistle to the Romans: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past tracing out!" And this wisdom and knowledge should not only be heard by those who will listen, but should be seen in the lives of those who preach. For, says James: "The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without variance, and without hypocrisy."

A herald, a preacher, a life of goodness, wisdom and knowledge. That is the task and the life of every saint. We

are heralds of Jesus our head, who is to come again. He was the perfect word, or wisdom of God made flesh; he is His salvation; he is the king of glory; he is the peacemaker; he is our righteousness; and every one of us would dishonour God if we withheld from others His arm of salvation.

Today, more than ever before, the world longs for stability, for peace, for solutions to economic problems, for the hope of a brighter future: and it finds only despair and darkness and possible self-destruction. The saints add to their preaching of God's goodness, wisdom, knowledge: all perfected in His unique Son, the hope of the kingdom that will provide all the longed-for attributes of ordered government throughout the world, so that all peoples will know God and His gifts.

A Big Preaching Programme

This is a big programme of preaching in which every individual and every ecclesia should be fully engaged. The coming of the Lord is now much nearer than when we believed, and world events, as well as prophecy, point to a near crisis and consummation of world history. This is an outstandingly important task and if we busied ourselves to a greater extent in this work of the Lord, we should have less time for unprofitable "foolish questionings".

How then shall we preach? If it is true that we should love in deed as well as truth it is also true that we should preach by example as well as word. The integrity of our response to our daily work, the helpful service we are prepared to give any who need our help are silent witnesses to the compassion of a loving God to all men.

Personal Witness

Our faithfulness to our ecclesias sometimes preaches more strongly than our words. The constancy of an aged sister who walked a long street Sundays and week-nights to her meetings in all weathers, after several years aroused the curiosity of a middle-aged couple who stopped her to ask where she went-and two more were added to God's household. The young brother dying of a kidney disease in hospital left a lasting impression of his enthusiasm for the coming Kingdom and led three, his parents and another into the way of life. In health or in sickness, living or dying, we preach Jesus Christ and him crucified, and the hope of glory in the Kingdom that is to be.

Personal witness to God's love and His purposes on the public platform is the most familiar function of the ecclesia, and it can be a very valuable witness if an ecclesia can persuade people to come to these meetings. Alas, it seems very difficult to get people to leave their television screens to hear of the Word of life.

The individual and personal witness is more powerful than any, and the welcoming of friends to one's fireside, or the organization of a home Bible class to which friends are invited, has proved a fruitful source for preaching the Truth. Invitation to nothing more than Bible Readings has led to requests for information and study that has borne fruit to God's glory. There are some who have a greater flair for and have found greater returns in these ways, than many who have served the public platform for years.

It is still true that God works in mysterious ways. Somewhere there is a young sister who may not know that in a few minutes' conversation with a demobilized soldier (some years ago) she succeeded in leaving just one word in his mind, "Christadelphian". Months afterwards he saw the name on a notice board outside a meeting. Today he is a vigorous, enthusiastic witness himself.

The Value of Leaflets

Leaflets left on a bus or train have sown seed that has yielded fruit. The series of pamphlets that were left on the table at a friend's house made no impression at all except the one that was picked up by another friend who called shortly after it had been left. It led him to the waters of baptism.

Sometimes fruit had been gained merely by persistence; how thankful a certain brother and sister must be that someone continued to deliver leaflets to their house. The parents who lived in the ground floor flat carefully guarded the young married couple in the flat above from all assaults on their religious convictions, by destroying any leaflets pushed in the letter-box-until the day that they were out, and another leaflet was delivered. Soon two more enthusiastic souls were added to the Lord.

One never knows the ways in which the Truth may reach searching minds. Who would have thought that a leaflet crumpled and thrown away by someone, would be picked up to illuminate another? Or that a pamphlet left in a drawer in a hotel bedroom would, months afterwards, enlighten someone who took the trouble to read it?

Everyone Can Help

Instances like these witness to the fact that all can help in the communication of the gospel; that there are a multitude of ways in which it can be done and that we can never tell exactly how what we may do will achieve its purpose. What matters is that each of us should strive in the ways that best suit us to witness to God's Truth and love.

There is joy in the possession of these divine gifts, and satisfaction to be enjoyed in this life for everyone who is prepared to sacrifice for them, for such "shall receive a hundredfold now in this time ... and in the world to come eternal life".

We bear the name of God, our Father, we have received His wisdom, we have been redeemed by the Lord Jesus, and we prepare for his coming kingdom. Let us be wise in living, and generous in giving the life-giving gospel to all who will. Daniel, referring to the time of the end, said: "Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever."

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Chapter 9 THE BELIEVER AND THE STATE

WHEN a convert is crucified, dies and rises from the dead in the figure of baptism he (or she) begins the new life as an adopted son of God, with a total allegiance to Him as heavenly Father. The first consequence of this is that the believer enters into a fellowship or partnership, in a common purpose with God, with Jesus and with a host of his brethren.

Loyalty to God

This divine conception of fellowship means that every aspect of life has to be lived, and every decision has to be made with this allegiance to God in mind. And at no time should there be a question of a divided loyalty. In this life, the believer has to live under the authority of the State and problems arise when he has to decide the extent to which his obedience to authority can go. Even Jesus had to make decisions of this kind.

On one occasion the disciples of the Pharisees and the Herodians who represented completely opposed political views, joined together for the purpose of trying to trick Jesus into making admissions, and asked him: "Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?" If he had said, Yes, it is lawful, then according to their view he would have abandoned his claim to be Messiah and deliverer of Israel: he would have expressed his readiness for the Jews to remain under the heavy yoke of Roman rule and taxation. If, on the other hand, he had said, It is not lawful, then they would have been able to report him to the Roman authorities and have him arrested. His answer skillfully evaded either possibility: "Render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's." The manner of his reply was based upon advice he had earlier given his disciples: "I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves; be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves."

In this case Jesus dealt with the matter of tribute, or taxes, and he made it quite clear to his hearers that in the circumstances taxes were due to Caesar and should be paid, but he made it just as clear that there were duties that belonged to God and these too must be met.

The Apostle Paul, when writing to the ecclesia at Rome about "being subject unto the higher powers" also stressed that it was the duty of the believer to meet the proper claims of the authorities: "Render to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour." But, and this must be strongly stressed, the believer must always keep in mind his total loyalty to God. Jesus made this clear when he said: "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon."

The believer owes his duty to God as a son, and he accepts and obeys the demands of the State only so far as they do not conflict with the commands of his Father. If a believer is in doubt about a decision, he does best if he thinks of his Father first.

Peter and the Apostles early had to face this issue of loyalty when the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem charged that they should not teach in the name of Jesus. They rightly answered: "We must obey God rather than men."

Conscious of the difficulties of the believer in making decisions about the demands of the State, Peter wrote that they ought to submit themselves "to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as sent by him for vengeance on evildoers, and for praise to them that do well". What he was saying was that the believer should be a peaceful law-abiding example to all. But his own martyrdom was an illustration that the State can make demands which only God ought to make, and such demands must be resisted even to death.

Applying Principles Today

Can we apply the scriptural principle of duty to God and to Caesar today? We certainly can in many cases. We all pay our taxes willingly if not cheerfully! And no one should make any attempt, in the slightest degree, to evade them. But to what extent should we involve ourselves in the affairs of the State?

One of the privileges of citizenship is the opportunity to vote for candidates in local and parliamentary elections, and if the believer were a true citizen of this world he would vote for either a Labour, Liberal, Conservative, Democratic or Republican candidate, as the case might be. But the believer is not a citizen of this world: "For we have not here an abiding city, but we seek after the city which is to come."

The Apostle Paul, writing about the believer's high calling of God in Christ Jesus, and of being like-minded or Christ-minded in the things of God, said: "For our citizenship (conversation, A.V.) is in heaven; from whence also we wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. . ." Could the members of a community of believers be like-minded or Christ-minded if they were divided in the politics of the State? And does God support, or approve support of every political party, and every national policy throughout the world?

The reason for the coming kingdom of God on earth, ruled by Christ the King and his like-minded brethren, is the failure of human policies to achieve the happiness of the human race in the knowledge of God and His blessings. This lack is to be made good in the age to come.

In the long run believers serve the State and the world best by refusing to become involved in policies which are rapidly taking the race to ruin.

Jury Service

Another "privilege" of citizenship is the duty to serve the processes of law and order by attending, at an appointed day and time "and so on from day to day until discharged by the Court, to be of a Jury to try between our Sovereign Lady the Queen and the several Defendants and Prisoners to be at the bar". The wording of the summons to jury duty will vary according to the country, area or county, and the Court.

In Britain, at least, as a matter of law, there is no exemption from jury service on conscientious grounds, although those who are in certain classified occupations are exempted from this service.

Because the jury is meant to function as a protection for the innocent rather than in vengeance upon the guilty, many believers have satisfied their consciences and have given service on juries. Each must be satisfied in his own mind.

This is a matter which ought to be decided on some background of scripture at least, and not on a kind of snap judgment, remembering always that we are sons of God, and that our citizenship, or commonwealth, is of heaven.

Jury service means, above all, the exercise of judgment. On the broad issues of judgment Jesus had this to say: "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured unto you."

From what Jesus says in the context it is obvious that he was warning his hearers that they were to be careful about the way they judged people. If they set out to give their verdicts and sentences on others mercilessly and ruthlessly then they must expect to be so judged themselves. The believer when he thinks of his own judgment at the coming of Christ, the judge of all, hopes and prays that he may find mercy at the hands of the Great Judge.

The Exercise of Judgment

Every believer has from time to time to exercise judgment; but Jesus leaves each in no doubt as to the kind of judgment we should exercise and Paul shows that this is expected of us; in fact he shows that the believers failed, in some respects, to use their spiritual privileges adequately. This is what he told the Corinthians: "When one of you has a grievance against a brother, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more matters pertaining to this life? If then you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who are least esteemed by the church? I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no man among you wise enough to decide between members of the brotherhood, but brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers?"

In some respects, it is obvious that none should be better suited than believers to serve on juries and to pass judgments on their fellow men. Possibly, here lies the reason why some have been ready to give such service.

Many years ago the writer decided as a matter of conscience that he saw no grounds for refusing jury service. The experience was illuminating. Truth was frequently clothed in anything but garments of righteousness, and judgment was not always tempered with mercy. But the overwhelming impression that was left on his mind was that he was in the wrong place; he was working with unbelievers whose attitude of mind belonged to a world in which the believer is but a pilgrim, and whose judgments were part of a citizenship to which we are alien. The

sting of Paul's advice to saints on judgment comes at the end: "and that before unbelievers."

There is, perhaps, no clear-cut scriptural guidance that will satisfy everyone and each believer must decide the issue for himself, realizing that unless one is, according to the provisions of the Jurors' Act, exempted from jury service, the penalty for refusal to serve may be a fine.

In decisions of this kind, nothing should obscure our loyalty to God, our Father, and to Jesus, our Lord. Nothing should dun the glory of our call or the wonder of the Word of life which so sustains our heavenly citizenship. These are the supreme spiritual facts on which all our decisions should be made.

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1 John 1v3, Matt 22v21, Matt 10v16, Rom 13v1, 7, Matt 6v24, Acts 5v29, Heb 13v14 RV, Phil 3v20 RV, Matt 7v1, 1 Cor 6v1-6 RSV,

Chapter 10
THE BELIEVER AND THE STATE:
"RESIST NOT EVIL"

IN A letter which Jeremiah sent to "the residue of the elders which were carried away captives, and to the priests, and to the prophets, and to all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried away captive from Jerusalem to Babylon . . ." he gave advice which must have proved positive and helpful to all who have been aliens and pilgrims throughout the world ever since. It was God-given, comforting and sensible: it advised them to become resigned to their new environment, to build houses, plant gardens, marry, beget children and "seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the Lord for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace".

Most believers today live in countries which allow them freedom to worship and to preach the Gospel, and they should not neglect to pray for the peace of such countries. The Apostle Paul confirmed the advice of Jeremiah and the teaching of Jesus when he wrote to Timothy: "I exhort therefore, first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings, be made for all men; for kings, and all that are in high place; that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and gravity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of our God and Saviour."

Such a unity of teaching and exhortation makes it clear that our task in this world is to think peace, live the peace of Christ, and preach the peace of his kingdom. But the peace of the Body, or Ecclesia, of Christ can only be as strong as the peace which exists in the hearts and minds of individual believers who have made a reality of the peace of Jesus in their lives.

"This Present Evil World"

Although Peter, Paul and John the Apostle join in giving this kind of advice, they knew the kind of world in which believers have to live: "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness." The salutation of the Apostle Paul to the Galatians refers to the world in similar terms: "Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world.. ."

If the world of today is different from New Testament times, it is only so in the degree of evil which, world wide, is much greater than ever before. It is a world which still lives by the law of retaliation.

To be saved from this present evil world the believer must follow the course set for him by Jesus: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." This means that the believer must do good to brother, friend or enemy; he must pray for those who spitefully use him; he must love his fellow men, even those who hate him! This is a hard way to live, but it is the only way if we wish to enjoy an endless life.

It is on these bases, and with this kind of spiritual outlook that one's relationship with and service to the State must be viewed.

"Resist not Evil"

The rule which Jesus left for the guidance of his followers was: "Resist not him that is evil: but whosoever smiteth thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." The word translated resist means to withstand or oppose. If we remember that Jesus put this rule of conduct against the law of "an eye for an eye" it will be seen that what Jesus is saying is "Do not retaliate".

Jesus and his followers lived by this rule, but it did not stop them frustrating evil men when they could do so, as Jesus did when the Jews would have thrown him to his death over the brow of a hill, and as Paul did by claiming Roman citizenship.

The modern believer too, like the followers of Jesus, must live by this rule of conduct. If someone throws a stone at him or attempts to use a weapon against him, he would not do wrong to take evasive action, or to protect himself. But vengefully, in anger, to beat one's assailant, to throw stones back, or to take other offensive action would be wrong.

A sister would do right to defend herself if a ruffian attacked her and any believer would be acting within Christ's

rule of conduct if he left his assailant to the processes of law.

The task of the believer is to submit to transformation by the renewing of his mind in Christ, not to be conformed to this world; to obey the rule of Christ and not the law of retaliation. "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord." The time is to come when we may have the opportunity of administering the perfect rule of Jesus in a better world-the kingdom of God. In the meantime we must "submit ourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake".

Daily Occupations

The believer has not only to live in the world, but has to work in it, and it is important that he engages himself in occupations that can be done "as unto Christ... with goodwill doing service as to the Lord, and not to men".

The heart of the matter in any issue of this kind is not whether a scripture can be found to justify or solve any particular situation, but whether one will preserve loyalty to God and serve our Master, Christ, by taking a course of action which is really based on personal desire. Thus the choice of a profession or occupation must be faced with the objectivity of the Christ-mind, and not the calculating subjectivity of the Adam-mind, so serving the will of God and not of the flesh which prefers to avoid an unwelcome choice. On the decision a believer makes may depend eternal life or death.

Occupations like the police force or the manufacture of munitions are not for the believer, for they belong to the way of the world. Many years ago a brother who was converted whilst he was an officer in the police force quickly found that his duties so tested his new-found spiritual conscience that he was obliged to seek other employment. In the violent world of today how much greater would be the strain upon the Christ-mind! This is not our world; we are aliens in it and a believer would be out of his spiritual element in a number of occupations of this kind. Paul's advice is to the point: "What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? For we are the temple of the living God . . . Therefore come out from them, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch nothing unclean; then I will welcome you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."

The Sword of Death

Jesus was nothing if not direct in the teaching of fundamental principles, and more than once he illustrated them by using situations suitable for such teaching. An outstanding example of this was the occasion when he told Peter that he would deny him thrice. He then told his disciples: "When I sent you out with no purse or bag or sandals, did you lack anything? They said 'Nothing'. He said to them, 'But now, let him who has a purse take it, and likewise a bag. And let him who has no sword sell his mantle and buy one. For I tell you that this scripture must be fulfilled in me, "And he was reckoned with the transgressors"; for what is written about me has its fulfilment.' And they said, 'Look, Lord, here are two swords.' And he said to them, 'It is enough.' "

His reference to the time when the disciples went in faith on a mission, with nothing but a staff (Mark 6: 8), was now contrasted with their fear of the authorities and their declining faith in him, because he knew that two of them carried a hidden sword. So his command, "Let him who has no sword sell his mantle and buy one" brings not an affirmation of faith in him, but, "Look, Lord, here are two swords." They were soon to learn the meaning of his words to them.

While Jesus prayed at Gethsemane Judas came with an armed crowd. "And behold one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest, and cut off his ear. Then Jesus said to him, Put your sword back in its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword." To the chief priests and the captains of the temple Jesus said: "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs? . . . This is your hour, and the power of darkness."

Jesus could not have been clearer in his teaching: he showed that the sword, the club, the crowd, a number of whom would have been unarmed, and resistance to evil all belong to "the power of darkness" of this world. Thus one cannot separate non-combatant from combatant service and say that one is not as bad as the other. Each is part of "the power of darkness".

The believer belongs to a different citizenship. As Jesus said to Pilate, "If my kingdom were of this world then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews . . ." But it was because his kingdom was not of this world that Jesus did not ask for "more than twelve legions of angels".

Every believer wields a sword: "The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." This is the weapon of his warfare against "the world-rulers of this darkness". He also, with this Word, has to fight himself, because it is in the individual that war, strife and contention arise, from "the aggressiveness of your bodily desires".

When seen through the eyes of Jesus all the forces of law and order, whether national or international, are not our active concern: they are provided for a world order to which we do not belong.

Although we are called upon, as the first Christians were, to obey magistrates, we are not to sit on the bench with them! Whoever read of an Apostle or disciple being a magistrate! And in view of the teaching of Jesus, including the blessings of the Beatitudes, who could conceive his approval for anyone who joined the police force, sat on a magistrate's bench, or became part of a non-combatant corps!

This is not to say that we should avoid services of love to our fellow men when opportunity calls for it. We should give freely of our compassionate service to all in need of it. Whilst we are strangers and pilgrims in the land in which we dwell, we are not its enemy.

During the American Civil War of 1860-61, Dr. Thomas rightly claimed that Christadelphians were part of "An elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession . . . to show forth the excellencies (virtues) of him who called them out of darkness into his marvellous light".(tm) Believers tend to forget the nobility of this high and heavenly honour of God's call, and often overlook the fact that their primary duty in life is to manifest His Name and purposes to the people around them.

By teaching and example Jesus showed three ways in which it can be done: Resist not evil, love the world as God loved it, and preach the Gospel. He had little time for anything else-and neither have we.

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Chapter 11 COURTSHIP

IT is a heart-warming experience to watch the friendship of a well-suited young brother and sister deepen into love and a selfless devotion to each other. No one who has gone through that experience can ever forget the charm and the thrill of life as it matured to the day that brought the consummation of that love in marriage.

In the fading morality and the promiscuity of this modern age it is not always easy to realize that friendship that flowers into innocent love is not just a fragile, ephemeral emotion: it is a God-given, abiding part of life.

The Wonder of Courtship

The Book of Proverbs emphasizes the marvel of this divine gift in stirring words: "Three things are too wonderful for me; four I do not understand: The way of an eagle in the sky, the way of a serpent on a rock, the way of a ship on the high seas, and the way of a man with a maid."

What is it that draws a particular man to a particular woman? What is it that moves them so deeply-sometimes when they have only just met? Is it a beauty of face or figure? Is it a similarity of interests and outlook? Who knows-most of all the ones concerned? Two unique personalities meet and find a mutual response which neither can explain, and if true love flourishes something too wonderful to understand binds them in an indissoluble marriage of mind and flesh that is completely selfless and devoted.

As so many people in the world of today have ceased to think of this kind of love as a divine aspect of human experience it is all the more important that young brethren and sisters should strive constantly to preserve this high conception of courtship and marriage.

Ideally, in a society of saints, as we are, there would be every opportunity for young brethren and sisters to meet and to marry one another in the Faith. In many instances this happens and they meet at Bible study week-ends, campaigns, youth courses, fraternal gatherings, and the like. But not all have the chance of going to such gatherings and sometimes a young brother or sister is isolated not only in an ecclesia but through an occupation where there are no other young people of the Faith. In such circumstances, how does one find an outlet for one's natural and emotional response to the opposite sex?

Another problem which faces young people at times is that an affair of the heart does not begin to order. Friendship may start in a senior form at school, in college or university, at work or in leisure.

The Call of God

There is little harm in making friendships outside the Faith, if two things are thoroughly clear and firm in one's mind. First, that God has "called you out of darkness into his marvellous light". The spectrum of this light includes the knowledge of God and of Jesus, the awareness of His kindness and severity, and the revelation of His truth. God called us to this light and we obeyed His call. This is the important factor. Paul wrote that upon those who "do not obey the truth" would come "indignation and wrath".

This call of God must be kept firmly in mind, for upon faithfulness to it depends one's eternal future. Thus everything must yield to one's loyalty to God and to Jesus, even an affair of the heart-that is if the Faith is a reality and one hopes for the life immortal. Jesus was clear and uncompromising about this: "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." Obviously each will love his own close relatives-and each will love his (or her) sweetheart-but make sure that neither is elevated above Jesus, otherwise why wait for his coming and for all the great things that are promised us?

The second fact that needs to be clear is that whoever has not obeyed the truth is still in darkness in God's sight. This is His judgment, not ours. So however charming, tender, kind and gentle a person may be he (or she) is in darkness until the truth has been obeyed. God wants all these attributes in a person, but they must be the qualities of a person obedient to Him.

If one meets and is attracted to someone who is not of the Faith, what is one to do? First remember that mutual attraction is not only physical, it is also intellectual. There will be similar interests in books, art, music, games and hobbies. And in a world ripe with hate and violence, racial discrimination and political struggles, when so many

young people dread the future with its threat of nuclear warfare, one has a fine opportunity reasonably and tactfully to reveal one's supreme interest in and loyalty to a Father who, through Jesus, is to sweep these things away.

Discussing the Truth

Sometimes it may be difficult to get a friend to discuss the Truth, and here the author writes from experience. He was privileged to meet someone who was a strict Baptist, but because she had seen the evil consequences of religious controversy, she was reluctant to discuss anything to do with religion. What could one do in such circumstances? All that could be done, when we met, after our respective evening services, was to enquire the theme of the minister's sermon and to say, without discussion, "I wonder what he would make of such and such a scripture?" The seed sown in such a way bore its fruit, and it still brings a warm glow to recall that one's marriage to her was "in the Lord".

There need be no embarrassment in talking about one's paramount interest in life. If the attraction to someone outside the Faith is reciprocated your friend will be interested in what you have to say, particularly if it is explained in a kindly and tactful way. There could be no better service to a friend than to reveal to him (or her) the means of immortality and the hope of the Kingdom!

This introduction of one's spiritual interest in the Faith should be made at the start of a friendship, and its overwhelming importance for you should be emphasized. If your friend can be persuaded to join you at your meetings and to meet the brethren and sisters, so much the better.

The danger of friendships outside the Faith is that one's hope of the coming Kingdom may not be revealed until one is emotionally and deeply involved when, frightened by the thought of the possible consequences of marriage out of the Faith, one makes every effort to persuade the friend of the merits of the Truth. How can he (or she) be expected to understand at such a late date? The response is likely to be: "What is all the fuss about?" Or "Why wasn't I told before?" Thus one's last minute efforts may have an adverse effect on the friend, rather than otherwise, and one has done a disservice to God and His Truth.

Facing a Sacrifice

Sometimes it may happen that in spite of a mutual affection and one's efforts to convince the sweetheart of the certainty of Christ's coming and Kingdom it becomes more and more evident that there is little likelihood of his being convinced. What does one do then? One may ask the question: "Even though my friend is unlikely to embrace the Truth, must I lose him? May not the Lord forgive me if I marry him out of the Faith?" He may, but it is he who said that one who loves another more than him is not worthy of him.

Some have faced this issue courageously-and it needs courage of a high order to suffer the heartache and the pain of parting as well as the possibility of not meeting a like friend again. Throughout history sacrifices have been made for the Faith; none of us is unique in this respect, and rarely is anyone asked to yield life itself as some have done in the past. Paul wrote: "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord . . ."

When a hard decision of this kind has to be made it is well to remember that the Father is aware of it and will help through Jesus who understands all the ways of our lives. They can be a tower of strength in situations of this kind.

Self-Control

If one happily solves the problem of communicating the Truth, there may still remain dangers in courtship arising from deeply aroused emotions for one's friend. It is not only important to preserve one's loyalty to God and to Jesus, as well as to the Faith; it is also vitally important that one's emotions should be disciplined so that marriage is not anticipated before it can be blessed by the Lord.

In the scriptural context in the God-given terms, marriage is not the civil ceremony or the service that takes place at an ecclesia, necessary and proper as these are, so that one can take one's vow and witness to one's determination to live with one's partner faithfully. Marriage is the union of the flesh, and if this takes place out of its proper context and situation it can result, particularly in the woman, in such feelings of disgust and revulsion as to endanger her chances of a normal and balanced sexual life in marriage.

Courtship places a great responsibility on both; but particularly on the man to see that the dignity, the sweetness

and the charm of the association is not spoiled by conduct unbecoming to a saint of God. Paul emphasized the importance of this: "God's plan is to make you holy, and that entails first of all a clean cut with sexual immorality. Every one of you should learn to control his body." This applies equally to the highly sexed brother or sister who sometimes excuse themselves because of the strength of their sexual urge.

Chastity before marriage is not only a safeguard for the woman, and a preservation of her purity until the time when the vows of marriage will be taken and consummated, but it is a spiritual necessity that helps to safeguard one's eternal inheritance.

During courtship both will be wise to avoid compromising situations where each may find it difficult to cope with the consequences of deeply stirred emotions. Rather it is better to participate in all kinds of activities so that they will not be together for long periods when emotions may run beyond control.

The Finest Friend

Those who have broken friendships rather than sacrifice the Truth, and who have found no friend to replace the lost one, ought never to lose heart. The fact that the sacrifice was made for the Faith is evidence of strength of character and the value placed upon the Truth. No one will lose the reward for such a sacrifice. It may not be easy to realize in practice, but one has no greater friend than Jesus; two of his very great friends were single women, Mary and Martha. John, chapter 11, records the beauty and the strength of that friendship. And his greatest friend, John, seems to have remained single.

There are many who have found happiness in service whether it be to children, to the blind, deaf and dumb, to the aged and sick, and to any who need help. And there is so much need of help inside and outside the Brotherhood.

In whatever state or situation one may be, in courtship, in sacrifice, in sickness or in health, in adversity or prosperity there is no better advice than that given by Paul: "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

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Chapter 12 MARRIAGE

MARRIAGE is as old as man although it was no human invention. It was instituted by God who set forth its terms before the first marriage bore its fruit: "Therefore shall a man leave (forsake) his father and his mother, and shall cleave (be joined to) unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh."

The true significance of the terms of this divine institution is not always fully understood. If these terms are carefully thought out it will be seen that marriage begins with sacrifice: a man (or a woman) forsakes his own family to establish another; it is established as a joint venture: the man and the woman vow to live together as permanent partners; and it is consummated in the abnegation of self: the man and the woman abandon self-interest and individual freedom to become one flesh in sexual unity and family interest.

These divine terms of marriage are immutable: they are to last until human life comes to an end, until the life in which men and women "neither marry, nor are given in marriage". The scriptures make clear that these terms must not be interfered with or altered: "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."

The people of the world may revise these provisions of marriage; they may ignore the terms and may make marriage a temporary expedient to fit their increasingly lax outlook: but the people of God dare not water down or ignore the implications of His marriage law, devised for the benefit and health of all mankind.

If any one of the terms of marriage is not spiritually discerned, a marriage can be neither happy nor successful; therefore it is well that we examine the implications of each of the terms.

Sacrifice

One of the first things that a young married couple face is the change in relationship with parents. Instead of each being part of his own family in daily living there is a complete break, and an entirely new relationship begins between the man and wife. It is a sacrifice of one for the other.

If the marriage is to be a truly happy one this fundamental change of relationship and the sacrifice it entails must be understood by all the parties concerned. It is because this change is not always realistically faced and accepted that trouble can occur between the partners in the marriage and the parents. All the humorous quips about mothers-in-law arise from the difficulties which occur because of the failure of some parents to realize that God's dictum, "Therefore shall a man leave (forsake) his father and his mother . . ." is for their understanding, as well as that of the man and wife, and their neglect to adjust themselves to the new situation is, in reality, disobedience of God's will.

A proper response to God's purpose in this matter, and a ready acceptance, on all sides, of the new relationships created by marriage can lead to the happy outcome which God intended; both parents will unselfishly help when help is needed, and wisely refrain from interference when it is better that the young couple should learn from experience itself and the Scriptures. It will be found that they will seek the help of their parents when they feel the need of it, and will respect and love them the more when it is freely available.

For a son or daughter who has been spoiled and smothered by over-anxious parents, marriage may seem to make the break with parents a great sacrifice indeed. But the purpose of marriage is to integrate the new relationship into a new and divine family and each partner must strive to make it a divine reality.

When all the parties concerned in the marriage situation reverently understand God's purpose in it, the outcome can, for all of them, be a happy and joyful experience, especially when the marriage is consummated in the birth of children.

A Joint Venture

Marriage is not only a private but a divinely directed venture: "Therefore shall a man ... cleave unto his wife ..." Hence a marriage should be God-guided, otherwise it will fail to achieve unity of purpose. It is the Scriptures that reveal that "a prudent wife is from the Lord" and that a wise husband is "one that ruleth well his own house". The Proverbs give a detailed picture of the dedicated wife, and Paul in more than one place portrays an elder of an ecclesia as a faithful and blameless husband.'

The realization of this divine conception of marriage should add to the joy of the young couple who set out on this venture of creating a new family. It should also help them through the difficulties of their adjustment to one another, and to the break with their parents. How much stronger is a marriage when it is realized that there is another, if unseen, partner!

There are few greater challenges in life than the experience of marriage. No man or woman normally achieves the unity of relationship with either of his parents or brothers or sisters that is possible in marriage. The setting up of a flat or house, the gradual equipment of the home with all that is needed, the adjustment of the temperament of each partner to the needs of family life, the joint service in ecclesial life and the gradual development of an outlook and character shaped by the new relationship all contribute to a divine conception of unity to be found nowhere else.

Throughout marriage there is every reason for self-examination to continue so that both partners never lose sight of their divinely directed mission in the spiritual life; because if marriage begins to lose its spirit of partnership, there is the danger that each will go his own way to his own hurt and that of the children, if there are any.

If anything goes wrong with a marriage, it cannot remain a private matter, something which is the concern only of the man and wife: it is the concern of God also. This needs constantly to be kept in mind. Therefore a marriage must never be taken for granted; neither partner must be heedless of the wishes or the welfare of the other, and both need to remember that their marriage is a joint venture.

Self-Abnegation

It needs to be stressed that whilst marriage fulfills certain legal obligations, gives the man and woman the opportunity to make their vows before witnesses and enables them to receive exhortation, in God's sight marriage is the joining of the man and woman so that they become one flesh. Jesus emphasized this very clearly: ". . . and the twain shall become one flesh. So that they are no more twain, but one flesh." No more two persons, but one; no more two directions, but one; no more two lives, but one in a divine unity. How many fully realize the deep significance of this?

God was the husband of the nation of Israel and He desired them to enjoy the blessing of family unity with Him, but the marriage broke down because the nation went its own way, and became, in God's sight, a harlot, suffering all the evil consequences of loss of unity with her Maker.

The physical unity of the flesh in marriage is a symbol, a pattern of the spiritual unity which should be achieved in marriage. All the patience, tenderness and understanding which the husband should exercise towards his wife in the physical union should be practised in every phase of married life. Each should consider the welfare of the other, and both should strive to adjust their attitudes and lives so that God's desire for spiritual unity with His children can be achieved in their family life. Self-interest should give way to a selfless dedication to the interest and protection of the other partner so that the family unity becomes a true pattern of the Father "from whom every family in heaven and earth is named . . ."

It is failure to appreciate this divine, this doctrinal basis of marriage that sometimes leads to marital troubles; the failure to realize too, that unless each partner consciously sets out to adapt his life to the physical and spiritual unity that marriage ought to be, there is little chance of true happiness.

A happy marriage is the supreme example of fellowship and from it can flow, by example and guidance, the continuing ecclesial fellowship through the children of the marriage.

In the Lord

The provisions of God's law of marriage are clear and unchanging, and if we lightly esteem them or understand them but superficially we shall do so at our spiritual peril. When Jesus came he not only affirmed this law but emphasized its divine authority and transformed the conception of his hearers at a time when many men of Israel were increasingly lax in their responsibilities to their wives.

Paul, in a passage of great beauty, lifted the marriage law to a higher dimension when he added to the figure of God as the husband of Israel, that of Christ as the bridegroom of the ecclesia.

In clear terms he showed that as Christ is the head of the ecclesia so must the man be the head of the wife: the

husband who fails to realize his spiritual responsibility in this respect, and the wife who fails to be dutiful to her husband, are disobedient to the teaching of Jesus. But neither must dominate the other; neither must live his life, even in the service of the Truth, regardless of the other.

The husband who gives himself to spiritual service without regard to the possible psychological and spiritual consequences to a wife who has to pursue her lonely task of caring for a family, is guilty of a lack of spiritual proportion; and the wife who throws herself so completely into spiritual activities as to neglect both husband and family, is likewise guilty.

Jesus gave his life for the ecclesia; that is how the husband, even though he is the head, should love his wife; the ecclesia is the bride of Christ, and that is how the wife should love her husband. Even when it happens that only one of the partners has become a believer, Paul will not allow the marriage law to be ignored: "If any brother hath an unbelieving wife, and she is content to dwell with him, let him not leave her. And the woman which hath an unbelieving husband, and he is content to dwell with her, let her not leave her husband. For the unbelieving wife is sanctified in the brother: hence were your children unclean; but now are they holy."

The one who has been brought to the light of Truth may so develop to spiritual maturity and to a proper devotion to the marriage as in time to influence the other partner. The writer knows of one case where it took more than twenty years, to the deep and abiding happiness of both partners: "For how knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? Or how knowest thou, O husband, whether thou shalt save thy wife?"

Those who are courting or are contemplating marriage must remember that complete happiness can be achieved only when it is "in the Lord". History and experience show that where there is no unity of thought and purpose, whether it be between God and Israel, Christ and the ecclesia, or between a husband and wife, there may follow a break in fellowship and unity with God. How could it be otherwise? That is the sadness and the tragedy of divorce or separation.

When the Israelites were delivered from Egypt they were told that they should not "make marriages" with the peoples of Canaan. Moses gave the reason in words which are relevant today: "Thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods . . ."

Paul had much the same things to say when he wrote: "Do not be mismated with unbelievers. For what partnership have righteousness and iniquity? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?"

Marriage, properly understood and lived, is a part of the divine fellowship in which love, patience, sympathy, understanding and service can be truly learned, and happy is the couple from whom these flow to the rest of the household of faith, for their reward will be the eternal blessing of God, the Father.

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Chapter 13 THE WAY OF PRAYER

THE spirit of prayer is caught, not taught. It is caught from the prayers of the faithful in the Bible, and from the example of Jesus.

There may be difficulties. Some who have grown old in the Faith have confessed that they had not found it easy to pray; perhaps because of diffidence in speaking to the Father, or because it had been mistakenly assumed that one should use a particular form of words. Some found that they did not know what to pray for, or about. Yet the Father is the truest Friend of all and we can reveal things to Him that could never be told to anyone else.

Prayer is the opportunity for worship, for praise and thanksgiving, for supplication and for the joy of talking with the Father. It can be silent or uttered, and used anywhere and at any time: in a tram or bus, when driving a car or walking to work; at home, in the office or factory; or even whilst standing before a king in great distress. The Psalmist wrote of such a moment:

"Hear my prayer, O Lord,
And let my cry come unto thee.
Hide not thy face from me in the day of my distress:
Incline thine ear unto me;
In the day when I call answer me speedily."

The Humble Spirit

Whilst we have "boldness (i.e. freedom of speech) to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus", as sons of God we must show not only the respect that is due to our Father (who is the Most High in majesty), but must exemplify the kind of spiritual character that he looks for: "Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."

Before our Father we stand disarmed of all our human pride and follies, and it is proper that when we pray to Him we should remember how much we depend on His love and grace. The very act of prayer, whenever and wherever it may be used, should be one of deep humility. From his own distressing experiences the apostle Peter learned this great lesson: "Be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: casting all your anxiety upon him, because he careth for you."

Prayer is a spiritual way of life, and humility is its character. Everything we say and do should be controlled by a humble trust in God, and if anyone finds difficulty in expressing this humility to the Father there are helpful illustrations in the Scriptures from the lives of those who faced changes of circumstance and responsibility with this humble trust in Him. When Solomon was made king of Israel he knew that he could not possibly fulfil his office in his own strength: "Now, O Lord my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father: and I am but a little child... Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and evil . . ." What a tragedy it was that Solomon failed to preserve this humility to the end of his life!

The Beauty of Holiness

To divest ourselves of all pride of achievement and to humble ourselves before the Father is a prerequisite to worshipping Him, for this ought to be our first reason for praying to Him: "Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name: bring an offering and come before him: worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness."

The scientists who unravel some of the secrets of the molecule and the genes; the astronomer who peers out into frighteningly vast space; and the astronauts who photograph the beauties of nature's colours on earth, all proclaim the wondrous and mighty works of God. They unfold for us a multitude of reasons for our humble worship of the Father and the Psalms must often put into words for us what we feel about His Majesty:

"The Lord reigneth; he is clothed with majesty;

The Lord is clothed with strength, wherewith he hath girdeth himself;
 The world also is stablished, that it cannot be moved.
 Thy throne is established of old:
 Thou art from everlasting."

Expressions like these emphasize that in prayer our first thoughts should be the recognition and acknowledgment of the worthiness and holiness of God, our Father, and by so thinking we manifest to Him our reverence and respect for His Name and Majesty. No one has expressed this with the perfection of Jesus: "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by thy name." "Holy Father, keep through thine own name, those whom thou hast given me." But we can try to follow his example.

Praise and Thanksgiving

Whilst our prayers should begin with an expression of our worship and adoration of the Father, we should neither forget nor omit from them our praise and thanksgiving. Through His Word and the life and teaching of His Son He has entered our poor hearts and touched us with His love. And who can say that we deserve any of this?

We are prone, indeed we are quick to take our troubles to the Father; but we are slow to count our blessings and to thank Him for the bright vision of eternity which He has given to sustain us in the misfortunes which shape our characters. The spirit of praise runs through the lives of all the faithful of old:

"I will bless the Lord at all times:
 His praise shall continually be in my mouth.
 My soul shall make her boast in the Lord:
 The humble shall hear thereof, and be glad.
 O magnify the Lord with me,
 And let us exalt his name together."

Jesus made quite clear that prayer is a turning to God to glorify Him, and if this manifestly becomes our habitual thought in prayer it is surprising what strength can result from this forgetfulness of self and absorption of the Father. But the very spirit of this approach arouses the consciousness of one's own unworthiness set against His majesty. Isaiah felt this very strongly and his words are a salutary reminder of our frailty. How unclean must we sometimes appear to the Father! Others have felt this too, particularly after a grievous fault:

"Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindness . . .
 Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity,
 And cleanse me from my sin ...
 Create in me a clean heart, O God,
 And renew a right spirit within me ...
 Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation,
 And uphold me with thy free spirit."

These then, are the bases of true prayer: humility, worship, praise, thanksgiving, penitence; and throughout the Scriptures there are noble words and phrases that help us in our faltering search for the thoughts to express our emotions in these ways.

If our minds become conditioned to the sense of holiness that prayer in these ways engenders, we shall see our personal problems and anxieties in a better spiritual perspective. We shall neither over-emphasize nor underestimate our difficulties and shall pray for what we need, not for what we want. Above all we shall pray, as

far as possible, with the Father's will-His desires-in mind, rather than our own selfish wishes. This is the thought behind the prayers of Jesus, the thought behind: "All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." That this privilege was not to be an unlimited one James makes clear when he chided those who evidently lacked comprehension of the spirit of prayer: "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may spend it in your pleasures." Thus we must think carefully about our motives before we present our petitions to the Father.

When with a reverent sobriety we enter the holiest in prayer we do so in the knowledge that we are allowed "free speech" with Him. We are allowed to talk with Him and to tell Him of our joys and anxieties, of our sorrows and our cares. No one need worry about the words to be used because He is accustomed to hearing prayers in a multitude of languages and from children of the Covenant who may be illiterate or highly educated.

Personal Motives

The Father is more concerned with our motives than with our words, and with our hearts than with our language. He had said so! Thus we can explain our problems to Him in the words and phrases we daily use.

We are all by nature selfish and it is not easy to grasp the fact that the law and the prophets are founded upon a principle that is selfless: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." This is a love which yields one's whole personality, one's whole being to the Father; it is a love which is purifying and outward looking; it is a Christlike love. It is also a love that was bound to need a second commandment: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour (fellow man) as thyself." Thus prayer is not only meant to be Godwards, but should turn our thoughts manwards. It is because we remain so strongly selfish that we so often forget to pray for others: our own cares come first.

The Apostles Paul and James bring us to a proper sense of spiritual proportion in this matter, and their epistles illustrate the ways in which the second commandment should be applied in prayer. It is probably rare for any one of us to think of those who bear rule over us, and to pray that they may be allowed to continue a policy which allows us to proclaim the Word of life to others. Paul reminds us of our duty in this respect: "I exhort therefore, that first of all supplications, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty."

James emphasizes the need for thought for those in the covenant fellowship, and suggests a common bond of trust which it would be rare to find today: "Confess your faults one to another, and pray for one another, that ye may be healed."

Paul constantly kept in mind the care of the saints and did "not cease to pray for them and to desire that they might be filled with the knowledge of God's will.. ." But he also felt, very deeply, his need for the prayers of others so that he might be helped in his care of the ecclesias and his ministry of the Gospel. When he wrote to the Thessalonians his appeal was brief, yet moving: "Brethren, pray for us."

A Fellowship of Prayer

This kind of praying is an affirmation of our unity in the new life with the Father, with Jesus, and with one another. It is a fellowship of prayer, and it is when we can fervently pray for the needs of each other that we forget our own troubles and find our hearts healed of their distresses.

Because of the multitude of reasons for praying we could not hope to include them all in every prayer, but if our hearts are full of Christlike compassion we can make certain they are all included at some time or other.

Prayer is a particularly personal and intimate communion with the Father and any and every opportunity for it should be used. How often could the hours sleepless with worry have been eased if one had prayed instead of restlessly tossing in bed.

There are occasions when prayer sets the tone to, and forms an example of the spiritual life. One such occasion is the family meal when from an early age children can become accustomed to the giving of thanks. There are few more charming experiences than to see the head of a two-year-old child bowed whilst father renders thanks for the food provided. The meal can even be permeated with the spirit of worship and an assurance of hope, if, sometimes, the Lord's prayer is used, modifying it in one place only: "Bless this day our daily bread ..." This "pearl of prayers", brief but comprehensive, simple in expression, yet profound in meaning, would then be restored to our affection and remembrance, instead of being neglected.

Another occasion when devout prayer can set the tone is at our public assembly when we meet to worship and remember our Lord, and when we meet to herald the Kingdom or to study the Scriptures. We pray then on behalf of our brethren and sisters, and should have them, as well as our Father, very much in mind. Because of the fear of vain repetition in using the Lord's prayer, we have by our neglect of this, substituted phrases which are neither beautiful nor devout, and they have become so familiar throughout the years that young brethren absorb them and repeat them in successive generations. Yet when we pray we stand before "The Most High God" to speak for all.

Men of Prayer

If, on such occasions, we recall some of the most important elements of prayer already cited: humility, worship, praise, thanksgiving, penitence and supplication; and if, also, we devote time to absorbing the spirit of the prayers of Abraham, Moses, Samuel, David, Solomon, Elijah, Hezekiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Nehemiah, and above all, Jesus, we shall gradually imitate the worship and devotion which animated these men of God, and shall find a nobler spirit and expression of prayer taking possession of our minds.

"Lord, teach us to pray." Jesus was the only one who had the power and authority to teach men to pray, and it is one of the miracles of John's Gospel that his greatest and most intimate prayer is there at all. He prayed for many things, including the care of those whom he was about to leave behind. Who but Jesus would have prayed for those yet spiritually unborn? "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me."

The new life is a way of prayer as well as a way of faith. Whilst doctrine can inform our minds prayer, as devout communion with the Father, can transform them. But we all need the help of one another. Brethren, pray for me.

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Chapter 14 WORK

WORK is God-given and plays an important part in the development of character.

"Thus all must work: with head or hand,
For self or others, good or ill;
Life is ordained to bear, like land,
Some fruit, be fallow as it will."

Even in his innocence man worked: he had dominion over the things of the earth and sea; he dressed and kept the garden of Eden, and named the beasts of the field and the birds of the air. Work for him then was full of delight, and each day must have brought him the pleasure of achievement. But sin corrupts everything, and henceforth thorns and thistles were to plague his life, and his work would be by the sweat of his brow. However, though work may often be less pleasurable it is still vital for the formation of character; and for the one who cheerfully and gratefully accepts the challenge of a difficult or even unpleasant task it can yield the satisfaction and pleasure of work well done.

The Doctrine of Work

As in all aspects of life and living one should develop a conscious and clear aim in the daily round: a positive doctrine of work, so that life may have a unity of purpose as well as a harmony of the spirit, because the life of the spirit is one and there should be no sharp division of conduct between one activity and another: no selfish standard at work and a selfless one at home or in the ecclesia. If a false weight in Israel's trading was an abomination to the Lord, a false spirit in our work would be a sin against Him.

Work is creative and constructive and develops skills, confidence and responsibility in a man, whereas idleness corrupts and destroys character, except in a man who is beyond the age or is too infirm to work. God is never idle; His creations in the heavens and on the earth are evidences of the constancy of His purposes. Work prolongs the will to live, but the man who retires to a corner whilst still capable of work, loses it.

Fortunate is he who enters a profession or makes a life-time choice of a task which deeply interests him; he will enjoy life to a greater extent and be likely to serve the Faith the better.

There can be such a joy in work that there may be little thought of the money to be gained by it. A maker of wooden bowls in a primitive workshop was once told by a visitor, "You could make a lot of money out of these bowls." The workman's reply was, "I do not want to make money, I want to make bowls." Obviously he had to have money to live, but money was not his main concern-and it should not be ours. Our prayer should be:

"Give me neither poverty nor riches;
Feed me with the food that is needful for me:
Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the
Lord?
Or lest I be poor, and steal,
And use profanely the name of my God."

Such a doctrine of work is a necessary part of the life of the spirit, for out of it will come an integrity of service, a pride in creation, and an efficiency of work that will be evident whether one's work is interesting or uninteresting, responsible or menial.

The Bases of the Doctrine

The foundation of any doctrine of truth or life is dedication to God in all one's ways: "Serve Yahweh with fear, and rejoice with trembling", said the Psalmist, and this kind of sanctified response to God pervades the writings of the Apostle Paul regarding work and service to men. To him service of any kind was to be rendered as "unto Christ" or as "unto the Lord". Could the children of God do otherwise in any activity?

Paul as much as anyone knew that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" and that is why he writes: "Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ." The servant should fulfil his tasks not in fear and trembling of his employer, from whom he has nothing to fear if he gives good service, but in fear lest a lack of integrity in his work should cause the name of God to be blasphemed.

We are more fortunate today than the slaves of Paul's day, because they had neither freedom, nor redress for wrongs. Today an employee who finds conditions of work intolerable can seek work elsewhere. With conditions of slavery in mind Paul exhorted that there should be no answering back or purloining, but a showing of "all good fidelity; that servants may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things".

It may be difficult at times not to feel resentful of poor conditions of work or pay, and to feel that it is no more than an employer deserves if one "purloins" things, perhaps of small value; but it was Jesus who stressed that "the man who is faithful in little things will be faithful in big things, and the man who cheats in the little things will cheat in the big things too".

How happy are they who work with those "who fear the Lord with all their hearts", for in such conditions they should achieve a harmony of spirit in work impossible elsewhere, and in such circumstances "masters and servants" will realize that "both their master and yours is in heaven, and there is no respect of persons with him". But the fear of the Lord must first be in one's heart.

The Dangers

Whatever profession or work one enters it will have its dangers because evil increases in the world, and the children of God, unless they are already strong in character and in faith, will find themselves working in a climate of thought and spirit which may be completely alien to their godly way of life; and conduct and language among their fellows may prove to be "the wiles of the devil".

Another real danger is that one's choice of employment may be based, subconsciously, on the premise that it is a private matter and has nothing to do with the life of the spirit. This kind of thinking is sometimes aroused by the attractiveness of the prospects in a particular profession or job. Such thinking is destructive of the growth of the life-giving spirit of faith. "Know ye not that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. . . ?" was written regarding the sin of fornication, but the body, with all its thoughts, aspirations, emotions and cravings, is the vehicle through which we live every phase of our lives, and it belongs to God, for as Paul wrote: "Ye are not your own; for ye were bought with a price . . ." We cannot hope to make our own way in this life, making the best professional bargain we can, and then expect God to prepare a princely place for us in the next.

We are citizens of a heavenly commonwealth and have to be obedient to its laws of conduct and of doctrine in all things. So the choice of employment, where possible, should be based on spiritual considerations, and with an eye on the service that we should render to God in the Truth, the ecclesia and the home, as well as in our work.

If one is worried about the nature of the work being done it may be necessary seriously and prayerfully to ponder the question: "Would the Father, would Jesus, approve of the work I am doing?" Or, "Is this work such that I can truly say it can be done 'as unto the Lord'?" Every such consideration is important because having, by adoption, become sons of God (whether one is a brother or sister) we have to make our Father's interest our first care-if indeed we properly value our call and hope to enter the joint inheritance with Jesus.

It is this care for our Father's eternal purpose working in us which should make it possible to say, for example, of a schoolmaster that what stands out in his work is not only his sympathetic discipline of classes, or the examination results of his pupils, but the spiritual "tone" which he gives to his school. What should be noticeable in the working life of a craftsman is not only his delight and skill in his craft, but the spiritual influence which he exerts over the language and conduct of his workmates. And what should be evident in the life of a scientist, a doctor, or an accountant is not only the excellence of his service, but the spiritual quality which touches all his relationships with colleagues and clients. In all this there will be no "more-righteous-than-thou" attitude, nor "with eye-service, as men-pleasers: but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart".

Spiritual Proportion

In the new life of the spirit there must be a balance of aims and tasks. To be so ambitious about one's work or

profession as to make serious inroads into one's spiritual life would show a serious lack of proportion and would be the height of folly. By old age, if we are so spared (and life is all too short) our daily work is done, but eternity stretches out before us: and that should be our aim; therefore if one is to err in balance let it be on the side of eternity, and not on that of one's present, transient life.

When the apostle Peter wrote of the high and holy calling of the children of God he said that they were chosen so that they could "show forth the excellencies (virtues) of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light". Where better can brethren and sisters of Christ manifest divine excellencies than in their daily work, which brings them into association with their fellow men? It is indeed a great opportunity to let our light so shine that men may see that we have been with Jesus and are trying to manifest his good works.

We have been called to a great divine and historical purpose and our service in our daily work advances this purpose a little more every day. This consciousness of spiritual progress towards the divine goal was in the mind of Jesus when he said: "My Father worketh even until now, and I work." Their work continues, being perfected by their love and grace. Now we have been drawn into this continuing spiritual purpose and, with their help, have to perfect it in ourselves. If we are faithful to this work there is great reward, for we shall be privileged to hear the captain of our salvation, say: "Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

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Chapter 15 LEISURE

"To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven", or as the Hebrew word *chephets* is translated elsewhere, a tune to every desire or pleasure. Thus if work is the means whereby we earn our daily bread, leisure provides the opportunities for the fulfillment of our personal desires and pleasures that cannot be satisfied at the office desk or the factory bench. Although the Bible says very little about leisure, it does give us glimpses of its uses.

The soul (spirit), mind and body need to be refreshed and it is in leisure that there is the time to pursue ways of restoring oneself. Jesus enjoyed the opportunity of a change from the burdens and responsibilities of his mission, otherwise he would not have gone with his mother to the wedding feast, which was one of the infrequent occasions when a people who often worked very hard for long hours would discover that "a merry heart doeth good like a medicine".

The extraordinary charm that put the rich and the poor, men and women, the very young and the old at ease in the company of Jesus ensured him a welcome at any gathering. But even at such a joyous occasion as a wedding, he never forgot the will, or the desire, of his Father, or his coming sacrifice as the Lamb of God. Hence his reference to his death when his mother said to him, "They have no wine."

Different people use their leisure in different ways. In the days of the Apostles, the Greeks tried to provide for the spirit, mind and body of man by instituting schools for the study of philosophy, and gymnasia for the exercise and development of the body, and once when Paul was at Athens he came across some Athenians and visitors to the city who "had leisure for nothing else but either to tell, or to hear some new thing". This was an opportunity he was quick to take, and he soon turned their leisure into the pursuit of the God "that made the world and all therein". It was not Paul's fault that they did not respond to the wonderful news of God's salvation through Christ.

The Purpose of Leisure

Leisure then, is the time for recreation so that one feels whole again in health, energy and thought, and can return to work refreshed and invigorated.

A miner might renew himself by reading, whereas a student might refresh himself with outdoor pursuits. A young person might find a strenuous game of tennis a complete recreation, whereas an older person might find the pace of a game of bowls more agreeable. For all of us there is the need to escape from the daily routine of work and to refresh and renew one's spirit, mind and body.

In affluent countries today one of the outstanding problems for ordinary people is what to do with the increased leisure which they now enjoy: it is a problem which is far from being solved. But it ought to be no problem for us—should we not rather welcome the opportunities that such an increase brings?

For all who pursue the new life, leisure is but one aspect of the life of the spirit which should be dominated by the will of the Father who desires us to seize every chance to preach the Gospel and to help in practical ways our fellow man irrespective of race or creed.

Bodily Health

Sometimes mind and body become so exhausted that nothing but rest will suffice, and one must learn completely to relax: there is a time to laze! Generally, however, leisure is the time to fulfil our deepest desires, and to enjoy our greatest pleasures.

The energy of the young demands an outlet in games or athletics of one kind or another: football, hockey, cricket, tennis, badminton and the like. Their pursuit after one has left school is not easy, except in the case of games like tennis or badminton, because practice and team matches so often cut across activities in the life of the spirit.

The young brother who was an enthusiastic member of his school eights in rowing would have liked to continue this activity with the Old Boys' Association, but the days for practice were Saturday and Sunday. The issue was decided by the will of the Father, as it must always be decided where there is a clash of interest.

Even in old age the body needs exercise, whether it be at gardening or in the more gentle activity of walking. But in all these matters there must be some sense of proportion so that leisure time is shared with other interests, particularly the divine, for "while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and so for the life to come".

Hobbies

In Old and New Testament times a multitude of crafts were carried on and among those mentioned are basketmakers, carpenters, carvers, embroiderers, makers of jewellery and weavers. Although we live in a technological age when so many of these and other hand crafts have been replaced by machine manufacture, many of them have been preserved as the hobbies of those who like to use some of their leisure time to create objects of beauty or utility.

There is great satisfaction in creating things whether it be in wood or metalcraft, in dressmaking, or in the painting of pictures. Creation is a divine activity which goes on ceaselessly. To see a finished embroidered cloth, made from a multiplicity of coloured threads, is to feel a pleasure rarely experienced in the mundane daily pursuits, and to see a completed painting of a landscape is to enjoy an emotion too deep for an artist to communicate.

Whilst creative hobbies have a valuable influence on our lives, we have to remember that the creation of a personality and character controlled by the Christ-mind is the greatest creation of all-sometimes one of great beauty; and whilst hobbies can contribute to the development of such a character, they must not become such an obsession as to weaken our hold on the life of the spirit. It was the greatest carpenter of all time who said: "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." Besides working on hobbies at home, there is work waiting in the great world outside where, as Jesus said, "the fields are white to harvest," and we have to help in that too.

Reading

"Reading is to the mind what exercise is to the body", wrote Steele, and there can be no doubt that a mind well stored from wide reading helps in the development of a well-balanced character. Dr. Thomas read widely in prose and poetry. "He was particularly attracted to Milton; and in the pages of *The Herald* were quoted Justyn Martyr, the Epistle to Diognetus, Francis Bacon, Sir Isaac Newton, Chilmngworth, Hobbes, de Quincey, and others. From the poets there are quotations from Byron, Butler's 'Hudibras', Cowper, Burns, and Thomas Hood .. His familiarity with Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* is obvious to every reader of *Eureka*."

Very few of us today would have the time, or would be capable of the dedication of Dr. Thomas to such wide reading, so that there must be a wise selection of reading that will inform and instruct, as well as assist us in the study of the Scriptures. A deal of modern literature should be avoided because of the conviction of the authors that life should be portrayed "in the raw" with all its vices, sins and violence.

A careful use of leisure time will ensure that the need of exercise for the body will not lead to the neglect of the culture of the mind, and neither should be so emphasized as to affect the reading of the Word of God. General reading is an education for life; reading of the scriptures is an education for eternal life. Thus the daily readings should be as essential a part of life as eating or sleeping, but how often would we abandon a meal to preserve the daily readings? And some time should be reserved for deeper Bible study.

It has to be acknowledged that some are not attracted to reading and find it difficult to concentrate on the daily readings after the day's work. The effort of self-discipline must be persisted in until it becomes a habit. It helps if it is made a family affair at a definite time-and if the chapters are read aloud as was done in the days of Nehemiah, when the people revered the Word so much that they stood in their place to hear it read by those who "read in the book, in the law of God distinctly; and they gave the sense, so that they understood the reading". That is how we should view our daily readings, for they are our life and it is at this time that the Lord makes us "to lie down in green pastures ..." It is then that "He restoreth our souls".

Entertainment

There are times when leisure study becomes "a weariness of the flesh" and when exercise and hobbies become distasteful to a jaded mind and body. At such times we seek something light and relaxing to mind and body. If one is interested in music, the concert hall offers entry into the beauties and depths of sound. But if there is little or no interest in music, what then? The cinema or theatre? Once, both could occasionally offer worth-while

entertainment that would refresh one's spirit, but today both seem to be infected with the fever to portray the sins of the flesh, against which we ourselves fight a daily battle.

For most people television has replaced the cinema screen, and for many it has become the home version of the concert hall, theatre and even church or chapel. Whilst many will condemn the vice and violence shown at cinemas and theatres, they will view such programmes at home because they find it difficult to discipline themselves by careful selection.

Sometimes when the writer has been visiting the homes of "fellow-saints" he has been interested to notice that they have been viewing items which they would not otherwise have seen because they belong to the music-hall type of entertainment which they would have roundly condemned had they been asked to go to such a place!

In television viewing there needs to be a careful selection of what will help to inform and uplift. The greatest danger of this medium lies in the demands which it can make on leisure time that is too valuable to waste on the vapours of life.

Service

Eating, working and sleeping; the rest of the day is ours! All are God's provision for the health and welfare of His creatures, and if our daily work is done "as unto the Lord" our leisure moments too, in family, ecclesial or social life will be filled with the consciousness of the need to "shew forth the excellencies (virtues) of him who called us out of darkness into his marvellous light". If this spirit animates our whole being our family life will be dignified by it, our ecclesial affairs will be purified by it, and our service to others will be sanctified by it.

During our leisure hours we can fulfil some of our true "desires and pleasures" which are comprehended in the will of the Father; and as one grows more mature in the life of the spirit, the more active one becomes in the Father's "business" until there is little time for anything else. Such time spent now is invested for life eternal. As soon as the message of Jesus and the disciples became known, and their works were made manifest we are told that on one occasion "they had no leisure so much as to eat", so that Jesus had to say to them : "Come ye yourselves apart unto a desert place, and rest a while."

A part of the business of the Father is service to others : for this is the reality of loving one's fellow-man. Jesus exemplified it in his service to all sinners, but particularly to his own disciples, for this is a divine principle whether manifested in mortality or immortality. In his mortality Jesus washed his disciples' feet, and in his immortality he prepared a dawn meal for them when they returned from a fruitless night of seeking fish!

Unless we understand our divine role of service in this way: unless we think more of serving others than of satisfying our selfish wants, we are neither Christ-like nor God minded. Every assertion (in pride) of self rather than Christ, every rebellion against the circumstances of life rather than submission to the will of God, is a denial of both.

We are living in the last days of Gentile dominion and time steals on our youth and eats into our age, and whilst we have the leisure hours that God has given us we ought not wantonly to throw away any chance to manifest His love, compassion and benefits to others, not the least of which is the glorious news of salvation through His Son, and of the coming Kingdom on this earth.

May we always pray that we shall be guided to use wisely and well the spare hours of our God-given time!

"Bless thou all our days of leisure,
 Help us selfish lures to flee;
 Sanctify our every pleasure;
 Pure and blameless may it be;
 May our gladness
 Draw us evermore to thee."

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Chapter 16 MODESTY IN ALL THINGS

ALL that has been written on the new life so far rests on the premise that as adopted sons and daughters of God we are called upon to be "followers (R.V. imitators) of Him, as dear children". Hence character, outlook, behaviour, dress and actions have to be in keeping with this divine relationship and our Father must never be ignored in our thinking or decisions on these matters.

The comprehensive word that describes this balance of character and conduct is modesty, which means: to have a humble estimate of one's own merits, to preserve good taste, to be dignified and proper in behaviour and morals.

Although this definition of the word modesty belongs to the English dictionary, it is obvious that the characteristics which it discloses were manifested by Jesus and have a great deal in common with the fruits of the spirit. But the word that Jesus and New Testament writers used to describe them was humility which is another word for modesty.

It is tremendously important that, with the Father's help, we strive so to discipline our natural inclinations that we gradually become modest, or humble, in character and conduct, because our spiritual well-being depends on this change taking place. Jesus said that "he that shall humble himself shall be exalted" and in another place he defined such exaltation as being "greatest in the kingdom of heaven".

Modesty of Character

We all differ in character and personality. Some are bold, confident, and able to blow a "loud trumpet" to draw attention to their merits, whilst others are diffident, reserved, and over-emphasize what they believe to be their lack of ability. Jesus gave a very good example of these extremes when he related the parable of the Pharisee and the publican who went into the temple to pray. The Pharisee's prayer was: "God I thank thee, that I ... I ... I ... I ... I ..." The publican's prayer was: "God be merciful to me a sinner." As we would expect, Jesus condemned the trumpet blowing of the Pharisee and said that the humble sinner "went down to his house justified rather than the other". What matters is the Father's estimate of our worth.

As faithful sons of God our task is to cast out from our characters the insistent "I" and persistently to affirm obedience to the divine "thou" which represents our Father and Jesus. This means the denial of the Adam-self and the assertion of the Christ-mind-not an easy task. But it can be done, as the rough and ready Galileans whom Jesus called showed.

Peter, the bold, impulsive, reckless one, who not only denied with an oath that he knew Jesus, but when pressed cursed and swore in order to save his own skin, so learned from the risen and compassionate Jesus that he could write: "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: casting all your anxiety upon him, because he careth for you."

John, one of the sons of thunder, was another who had to learn that his aggressive arrogance and ambition had to yield to the divine modesty which was so characteristic of Jesus. With James, John sought the highest place at the side of Jesus in his Kingdom, quite regardless of the claims of the others who also served the Master. And when the Samaritans would not receive Jesus, James and John said, "Lord, wilt thou that we bid fire to come down from heaven, and consume them. Yet it was John who, having absorbed the spirit of Jesus, wrote: "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love." Thus John learned to think more of God and of others than himself. He had discovered that the children of God, like their Father, must be kind "unto the unthankful and to the evil".

Humility of Outlook

This divine love, which is the heart of a knowledge and purpose greater than any in the world ought gradually to change our attitude towards life and people. If it does not succeed in doing this we need to do some very critical self-examination!

One with the divine outlook is compassionate: he shows love to the sinner whilst hating the sin; he is tolerant towards the strivings of others whilst rejecting their creeds; he will help to comfort and if possible supply the needs of others even though he may be distressed by their ignorance of their Maker. And his outlook is such

because he, too, was once a "stranger from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world".

Because we are grateful for the divine helping hand we should be all the more humble that we have been offered the opportunity of manifesting the compassionate love of God and certainly should not be guilty of a self-righteous superiority over others.

With the examples of Jesus and the Apostles to help him Paul realized that a radical change of outlook was necessary if the saints were to be faithful children of God and what he wrote to the ecclesia at Rome is as relevant today as it was then: "Adapt yourselves no longer to the pattern of this present world, but let your minds be remade and your whole nature thus transformed. Then you will be able to discover the will of God, and to know what is good, acceptable and perfect."

This is the only kind of nature that will help us to put into proper perspective our spiritual role in the world and enable us compassionately to view the weaknesses and follies of men so that we are the better able to help them when they need it.

Modesty in Dress

Those who have compassionate hearts need not be dow-dily dressed. The young, and sometimes those who are older, like to be "with it" as they say. They like to feel that they are in the stream of fashion, whether it be in dress, hair style, or general appearance. To some extent this is understandable, if not always commendable.

Fashion does exercise some control over people's habits of dress and general style. Jesus and the twelve would have worn the style of dress and hair that was proper to their time and race; as would Mary and Martha. In each age there is general consent as to what is decorous and proper; but it is obvious that a people who have been "bought with a price", and who are "a temple of God" are not as free to defy the conventions of their spiritual "race" as are people in the world.

To be "with it" in the time of Jesus would have been to wear the short style of hair as the Romans, and as today, there were always some who would defy normal convention; but we could hardly have imagined Jesus, the Apostles, or Mary and Martha, imitating the more extreme fashions. To them to be "with it" was to be "with God". Yet can one imagine Jesus being slovenly in dress?

We are living in an age when, in most things, people find little reason for restraint. Why should they? They do not belong to "an elect race"; they find no cause to think that God has any influence in their lives; they believe that a more liberal attitude is reasonable in sexual behaviour, and there is the general feeling that each man (or woman) should be free to use his own body as he wishes.

In such an age we should expect to find the bikini bathing outfit on the beach, and we should not be surprised to find the mini-skirt a prevalent fashion among young women; or the long hair with young men. They are part of the freedom in style and morals which is characteristic of the age, and they are the badges of this freedom. If the lower cut blouses and the higher cut skirts or dresses reveal more of the human form so much the better. Today men want to be stimulated and titillated. Morally this is neither a healthy nor a pleasant age and we who live the new life should make no concessions to its extremes of fashion.

The young (or older) brother and sister will always dress neatly and with dignity; will look charming in spite of not yielding to the extremes of prevailing fashion; will look what they are, "beloved children" of God. There is a hint of covetousness in wanting, for example, a dress that is the height of extreme fashion, and covetousness is one of the deadly sins; we should feel outside this urge to imitate what is really an undesirable fashion. Rather, we should be like Paul who said to the elders of the ecclesia at Ephesus: "I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel" (Acts 20: 33) and men and women wore fashionable-extremely fashionable-clothes then!

Lack of modesty in conduct and dress is not peculiar to our modern age: the Apostle Paul met it in his day in the ecclesias. Writing of the tantrums of brethren and of extremes of dress in sisters he wrote to young Timothy: "I desire therefore that the men pray in every place, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and disputing. In like manner, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefastness (modesty) and sobriety; not with braided hair (an extreme fashion then) and gold or pearls or costly raiment; but (which becometh women professing godliness) through good works." It will be obvious that Paul also thought "overdressing" (costly

raiment) a serious fault among the saints of God. Peter, too, exhorted against an unseemly display of dress, rather than modest apparel. Thus the saints have always needed the word of caution, and never more than today.

Humility in Behaviour

Modesty in all things springs from divine love—the love manifested by the Father through all ages: it is His love that created beauty in the Universe; His love that made angels and mankind. His love that gave His Son to rescue men from the pit of death which they had dug for themselves; and it is His love which should influence our behaviour towards others. As Paul pointed out to the Corinthians, this love is patient and kind; devoid of jealousy, boastfulness or conceit; courteous and unselfish, never gloating over the faults of others but always delighting in the word of truth.

As we work and walk in the world we should remember also that we bear the name and honour of the one who manifested this love and if we have any pride at all it should be in the way we conduct ourselves towards others: "For our boast is this that we have behaved in the world, and still more towards you, with holiness and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God."

It is through this love of God and neighbour, through bearing the name of God and of Jesus, that we become warm bright lights in the world, drawing men at times to glorify God. This is the transformation in us that the new life should reveal; this is the new man manifested to the world that men may see and know that we are of God.

This divine responsibility should discipline us in every aspect of life: in the ecclesia "that thou mayest know how men ought to behave themselves in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth"; and as an overseer of the ecclesia where one should be not only a gentle man, ruling one's own house well and humbly, but should "have a good testimony from them that are without (outside)". Thus we should never be guilty of quarrels, irritations or immodesties of speech, behaviour or dress in the ecclesia, nor should they be displayed for the gaze of the world, for it is through such that the name of God may be blasphemed.

The new life with all its diversities of experience and suffering is the training and preparation for our tasks in the life to come, and the godly man is one in all circumstances. The crucified Jesus is our example of suffering and of thought for others even in his dying moments and if we can truly follow him and take up with such assurance our own cross, we need have no fears: we shall always "walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time"; we shall always "love the brethren" and we shall always live with modesty in all things.

References

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 Luke 6v35, Eph 2v12, Rom 12v2 NEB, 1 Peter 2v9 RV, 1 Tim 2v8-10 RV, 1 Cor 13v1-6, 2 Cor 1v12 RSV, 1 Tim 3v15 RV, 1 Tim 3v7, Col 4v5

Chapter 17 GOOD WORKS

THE spiritual life devoid of good works would be as useless as a lamp without light. But what are we to understand by good works? Obviously they must be of the kind that will be pleasing to the Father, and Jesus gives us some guidance in this matter. When he was asked: "What must we do, that we may work the works of God?" he answered the multitude near Capernaum: "This is the work of God that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." In saying this Jesus opened up for the people the vast storehouse of Scripture in which the prophets, from Moses onwards, had written of him.

These prophets, who revealed the will of God, had shown that all things centred on Jesus. He was the focal point of all history and of all creation, and the "appointed heir of all things". Hence devotion to the Word of God is the supremely good work, pleasing to Him and profitable to the reader "for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness; that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work".

The parable of the ten virgins emphasizes this in a particularly vivid way. Each of them had a lamp. When we remember how heavily Jesus drew on the Scriptures, the allusion becomes obvious: "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet." And each virgin trimmed her lamp. The Greek word is *kosmeo* and means trim, adorn, beautify. Our word cosmetics is derived from this, but whereas people who use cosmetics beautify themselves, in the parable the virgins adorned or beautified their lamps, that is the Word. This we do also when we bind our minds in a deep devotion to it. And this is a good work in the best spiritual sense.

The Supreme Good

Everything then which expands and enriches the activity of the Word is a good work. In his writings Paul continually stresses this and he would have found it difficult to conceive of good works that were not related in some way to the Word. He wrote to the Colossians that they "might walk worthily of the Lord unto all pleasing, bearing fruit in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God.. ." And writing of the pastoral care of the ecclesia he said to Timothy: "If a man seeketh the office of a bishop (overseer), he desireth a good work."

Such works are the supreme good and they must never be neglected for they are the evidence of our love for the Father and a fulfillment of the great commandment given through Moses and cited by Jesus: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength." And what better way can this be done than by a devoted study of His will?

Devotion to the will of God implies "a readiness to be like Him in His kindness to all men" and Jesus drew this out when he added "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Love of God, love of the Word; love of neighbour, love of one's fellowman. This is the essence of true love. This also is brought out in the parable of the virgins. There was something else besides the lamp, the Word; there was the oil.

In the Old Testament oil is shown as a means of worship, purification and healing and as a symbol of sanctification, comfort, joy, peace and light. When Paul wrote to the Galatians of "the fruit of the Spirit" he showed them as "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law". So that oil is representative of the spirit of service to others: for it is only in relation to other people that these virtues make sense. They are Godlike virtues, manifested in their perfection in the life of Jesus and we have to be transformed into his image.

The new life, therefore, must be rich in deeds as well as in words: in compassion as well as in truth. Just as God "maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust", so His children will generously bestow the benefits of His love in them to all, in or out of the faith, irrespective of race or creed. Many of us are neither as vigorous nor as selfless in this respect as we might be.

Good works are the fruits of the selfless spirit which develops in the saints as a result of knowing God and remembering their indebtedness to Him. The Israelites were commanded to love the stranger "in giving him food and raiment... for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt". And Jesus exhorted his followers: "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets."

Jesus is our supreme example of good works founded on a firm resolve to give rather than to receive: "The Son

of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." The divinely motivated giver is more greatly blessed than the receiver. Thus life in the faith is not a lazy, apathetic acceptance of doctrine and a self-righteous enjoyment of the gifts of the Father with little or no thought of sharing with others, but an active manifestation of divine love which seizes every opportunity to serve wherever it is found and needed.

A Balance of Interests

Here as in other aspects of the new life one has to balance contrasting interests: in this case the Word and deeds. The Apostle James was right to emphasize this when he discussed the importance of faith and works: "What doth it profit my brethren, if a man say he hath faith, but have not works? can that faith save him?" With irrefutable logic and vivid example he shows that faith has little point or value unless it issues in works, and he concludes his argument by saying: "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead."

In spite of the evidence of scripture and exhortations in the Apostolic letters regarding the preservation of a careful balance between faith and works we can still be guilty of neglect of one or other, and sometimes of both. And it is possible for bodies outside our own so to miss the significance of these exhortations that they become outstanding exponents of Christian works but almost completely devoid of a Christian faith. Thus, if, in the sight of God, to have faith without manifesting works is to be dead, then to manifest works without having faith is never to have lived, before Hun! Faith and works hang together and life is nothing without them; as James argues: "I will shew thee my faith by my works." So we must exercise care and see that we do not over-emphasize one at the expense of the other.

There has to be a balance not only as between faith and works, but also in the direction of the works which are our generous fruit of faith. We must seek to share our service and our works so that our fellow saints will not be forgotten in a mistaken enthusiasm for service to the "stranger", or vice versa: "So then, as we have opportunity let us work that which is good toward all men, and especially toward them that are of the household of faith."

Even when the teaching and the exhortation are clear on the desirability of balance in the direction of our works we can be so filled with the desire to serve the brethren as to ignore the needs of others around us. In such cases the parable of the Good Samaritan should restore our spiritual perspective, for Jesus shows here that if we deliberately walk on the wrong side of the road in the presence of need, we may be deliberately locked out of the right side of the Kingdom in the day of Christ.

The Spontaneity of Love

Good works should be the outward and spontaneous expression of an inward spirit of love for men. This was an outstanding characteristic of the only begotten Son of God: it identified him with His Father. And it should be the mark of the divine in the adopted sons and daughters of God. It is this characteristic in us which identifies us with the Father, and glorifies Him. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven." It is when men are in the presence of a completely selfless character that they recognize the quality of the divine; and it is only this kind of person who can know God.

Such service must be selfless and must not be done merely for the sake of preaching the Gospel. The injured man in the parable might have stood little chance of aid and comfort if the Good Samaritan had first sought to discover whether he would receive his teaching! Love seeks only the opportunity to serve; it asks no return and lays down no conditions. But it is sometimes greatly rewarded in the turning of a soul to Christ.

Some are so moved, as Jesus was, by the sufferings of others that they seek full-time employment in professions that will allow their pity full expression: there is no analytical calculation of motives, pity is stirred and pity is set to work. Some become male or female nurses, and hospitals throughout the world, as well as the Christadelphian Home and Hospital for the aged, benefit from their labours of love. The work is hard and calls for great patience, but it is a work that would certainly be approved by the Great Physician. Some who follow other occupations share their leisure by giving some hours in the evening at the Home and Hospital thus reducing the strain on full-time staff and helping to bring variety of interest to the patients.

Others in professions like teaching reach out to children who are handicapped, backward, or are the victims of broken marriages and bring their special skills and sympathies to such children, as teachers, or wardens at Children's Homes. This, too, is a work that is trying and difficult, but can be highly rewarding, especially when a

child unexpectedly responds with an act of affection which expresses a deeply felt appreciation.

Pure Religion

Full-time employment of such a sacrificial nature is a test and a development of character and not all have the capacity or the staying power for it; but we are all called to serve, as Jesus did, and there are always the aged, the infirm and the sick, often at hand near one's home, who need and welcome help and comfort. Sometimes all that is needed is patiently to sit and listen to a soul unburdening itself.

To feel the urge to help others, even in menial ways, is to be sensitive to "the fellowship of his (Christ's) sufferings".

When James wrote his epistle "to the twelve tribes which are of the Dispersion" he reminded them of the self-discipline which they had undertaken in their fight of faith, and of their duties towards others. And to those who evidently thought themselves "religious" he defined, in practical terms, what this meant: "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless (orphans) and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."

No true Jew would have refused to visit or to care for the needy stranger within his knowledge, in addition to his concern for his own people, and as spiritual Jews we must show the same compassion for all. But anyone who has to calculate whether this or that good work should be done at all is in danger of the judgment that he is ruled by the letter of the Word and not by its spirit.

The hand of Jesus was held out to help before he said "Go and sin no more", and compassion responds at once to need, without thought of creed, colour, race or relationship, even though afterwards we may seek the eternal good of those we help; and our aid and comfort should still be available for them even if they reject our help in the spirit.

The Vastness of Suffering

We may be bountiful in the use of our gifts in the service of others, but a multitude of charities will still pull at our heart and pocket strings - we cannot help all. There will be some that specially appeal to one's compassion; orphaned and blind children's societies, destitute old people's societies, and the societies that appeal for the starving of the world. We cannot hope to help them all, but our left hand will still reach to help, before the right hand knows what was done!

As children of God we cannot remain heedless of suffering either in the Household or in the world: what we give in help or in money may be little more than the widow's mite compared with the vast amount of need that exists, but it must be given because this is our Father's wish; it is our faith, our fruit of the spirit, our love. Our Father has so abundantly blessed us that it should be the most natural (or spiritual) reaction to wish to share these blessings with others. All that we have is on loan from Him: they are His, and He wishes us to use them to the greatest spiritual advantage.

There is no great spiritual virtue in caring for one's own in family or ecclesial life; this is expected of us. "For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." What is virtuous is generosity of service to those who hate us, who may taunt us, and who may readily do anything to harm us: "If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink." To persist in good works to such is properly to manifest the generosity of the Father to all, for as Paul says, "In so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head."

It is by being involved in the relief of the vast suffering that surrounds us, by being steadfast in our devotion to the Word of God that saves us, and by being preachers of the Christ who died for us, that we shall be prepared for the days of our immortality (if we are so blessed); so we shall be able to understand the problems of the peoples of the Kingdom and be of help to them with hands strengthened by the power of an endless life.

References

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Chapter 18 BIBLE STUDY

We cannot recapture the joy that the disciples must have felt when they saw, not a pain-racked body on a cross, but the immortalized Christ invested with all authority in heaven and in earth; and it would have been with unbounded delight that they awaited each reappearance of their Lord.

All too soon he was to leave them, promising that he would always be with them "even unto the end of the world". In the meantime he appeared to them "by the space of forty days, speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God . . ." In his Gospel account Luke records of this period: "Then opened he their understanding that they might understand the scriptures, and he said unto them, Thus it is written and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead . . ."

The disciples would have known their Scriptures (that is, the Old Testament writings) far better than we do: their first lessons in the synagogue "school", their first attempts at reading, their first efforts at memorizing long passages would have been from the Scriptures. But knowing the writings by heart and interpreting them are different matters and many things that are now clear to us, as the result of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, would have puzzled them.

Even though the Scriptures pointed to the cruel death of Messiah, they found it difficult to believe that the man who had shown them that he had the power to give life to the dead, to give sight to the blind and to control storms, could possibly be killed on a cross. Hence their unbelief and their cowardice when Jesus was arrested and slain. But now the risen Messiah was making clear the things that had puzzled them, and giving them a vision of the Kingdom that made them unafraid of the hazards of persecution or the pains of death.

The Necessity of Study

We, too, need to have our understanding of the Scriptures "opened" and for us this means the Old and the New Testaments, for neither can be understood without the other, as Mark made clear in his Gospel record: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as it is written in the prophets . . ." And as Jesus made clear to the Jews: "Had ye believed Moses ye would have believed me for he wrote of me . . ."

The primary means of study should be the Daily Readings. They accustom us to the reading of both Testaments; they discipline our concentration, and they daily join us in a world-wide fellowship of reading and study that must give some satisfaction to the Father, and to Jesus, who is with us to the end of the world.

If we followed our undisciplined inclinations we would read some books regularly and neglect others, and in consequence our understanding of God's ways, and His plan, would be incomplete. In some way, for example, Christ is to be found in all the Scriptures, and through them all God reveals Himself and His purposes.

It is by a studied reading, too, of the lives of the ancients and of the ways in which God helped them to solve their problems, that we learn more about ourselves and our own problems. And in learning these things we prepare ourselves for the task of ruling the nations in the Kingdom with divine wisdom, understanding and compassion-for we, like Jesus, have to learn obedience by the things that we suffer.

If two join in the reading it can be quite instructive for one to read a chapter from the Authorized and the other to follow it with, say the R.S.V. or N.E.B. Differences can then be discussed after the chapter has been completed. Reading aloud is a good training for young brethren who may be called upon to read in the ecclesia. At present the standard of performance is not high. If more than two take part in the readings, as in the case of a family, a common practice is for five verses to be read by each.

The Problems that Arise

As the reading proceeds problems will arise. What is the meaning of this or that word? This is particularly the case with the Authorized. Version, but it is surprising how many obscure Bible words are defined in a good English Dictionary, and it is useful to have one at hand when doing the readings.

Sometimes, however, only a Concordance can help. What did the Lord mean when, referring to Leviathan, he said to Job: "By his neesings a light doth shine. And his eyes are like the eyelids of the morning"? The Concordance shows that the word neesing means sneezing and, appropriately, the Hebrew word for it is atishah!

Obscure words are not the only difficulties that arise: a verse, or a number of verses may pose problems. This is where good marginal references in a Bible can be useful. For example, when we read the penetrating and lofty epistle of the imprisoned Apostle Paul to the Ephesians we can understand him when he writes: "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called." And we know what he means when he stresses the unity of all things in the Father, through Christ. But when he continues: "Wherefore he saith, when he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men", what is he trying to convey to us?

By the side of the quotation beginning "when ..." in my Bible is the small letter "o" which the margin indicates is a quotation from Psa. 68." Further, by the side of the word "captivity" is a small asterisk, which indicates, in the margin, that an alternative rendering for this is "a multitude of captives". The R.S.V. rendering of this verse is: "Therefore it is said, 'When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men'."

How far have we got now? First, Paul has in this verse taken us back to Psalm 68 which recites God's marvellous love manifested to the children of Israel by leading them, through Moses, from the captivity of Egypt. If you read carefully it will be seen that seven stages of this salvation of Israel in the Exodus are recited: (1) The bringing out of the prisoners (verses 1-6); (2) His going before them through the wilderness (7-10); (3) His "scattering of the kings" in Canaan (11-14); (4) His ascension on high to the "Holy Place", with His people (15-18); (5) His role as the God of their salvation (19-23); (6) His establishment in the sanctuary that the people might sing His praises (24-27); (7) His praises sung by "the kingdoms of the earth" (28-35).

Why did Paul refer his readers to this Psalm? So that they might see that as God led "a multitude of captives" from the Egypt of slavery, so Christ has led a multitude of captives from the Egypt of sin.

Whilst the margin references have shed light on most of the verse, there is no reference for the last part "And gave gifts unto men". Only the Concordance can help here. But what are we to look for? Gifts that are related to God's people who were captives and were released. Numbers 18:6 provides the answer: "And I, behold, I have taken your brethren the Levites from among the children of Israel: to you (Aaron) they are given as a gift for the Lord, to do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation." Thus some of the captives were chosen as a "gift" for God, for special services to the rest of the congregation.

Now we can see the relevance of what Paul has written in the last part of the verse "And gave gifts unto men". Christ has chosen from the captives he has led, to serve the rest of the congregation in his tabernacle or ecclesia, those who are to be dedicated to this work. This is the way Paul denned the gifts of Christ: And he gave some, apostles (specially sent or chosen ones), some, prophets (those who publicly expound the Word), some, evangelists (those who preach good tidings), some, pastors (shepherds to the flock), and some, teachers (instructors). And all these are chosen as a gift to the Lord "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ". All these offices have their counterpart in the ecclesia today. But how many who are chosen for such service so dedicate themselves that they may truly be seen as a gift to the Lord as well as to men?

Much can be learned from this kind of questioning reading of the daily chapters, and none of us needs to be an intellectual to follow such a regime of reading. But it does need a little more time than merely reading the chapters. After all this is our spiritual education; in this we are being educated for eternal life. Secular education can prepare us only for this transient life. Which is the more important?

Concentrated Study

We have said that the primary means of study should be the daily readings, and we would be unwise to neglect this spiritual enlightenment and sustenance. But as sons and daughters of God, as those to whom the inheritance of the Kingdom has been promised, and as His children whom He wishes to endow with the ineffable glory of His "All in All", can we assume that we have completed our studies when we have done our daily readings?

There can be no doubt that the Father, Jesus, and the angels are unceasingly creative. The divine control of life and the Universe goes on without pause, for God has "appointed a Day" and all things move to this moment in time and history, for which a host of adopted children wait. So like the Father we must be spiritually creative, we must know more about how He has worked in the past, how He is working out His Plan to the last day of historical time.

In our secular education, occupations, business or professions we are often conscientious, painstaking and efficient. We tend to be careless and neglectful in the organization of our Father's business. Yet, if each of us was able to arrange time for a more concentrated study of Scripture we should develop a broader knowledge of God's purposes and ways, and a deeper vision of the glorious future He has promised.

Nothing is wasted in the Bible, and every book has its purpose. For example, the book of Proverbs is not just a collection of simple sayings conveying instructive teaching, such as "A false balance is abomination to the Lord: but a just weight is his delight", showing how God is concerned that even the trader shall preserve a righteous standard. It is also a revelation of the Mystery, Authority and Power of the Creator.

Some theologians today talk about bringing down God from "up there" and making Him the ground of man's being "down here", as if God has always been confined to an austere role "up there". The Proverbs show us otherwise: "My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights." God is the same whether He is portrayed in the Old or the New Testament, hence the writer to the Hebrews dealing with the Fatherhood of God quotes this verse from The Proverbs.

Why not undertake a concentrated study of this book? It is a study which most avoid, yet Proverbs is full of fascinating insights and revelations of God's eternal love. For a study of this kind it is useful to read from Moulton's The Modern Reader's Bible which renders the books of the Bible in a literary, and not a verse form.

This book gives the background to John 1:1. Remember how it goes? "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Now read Proverbs 8 which reveals the origin of divine wisdom:

"The Lord formed me in the beginning of his way
 Before his works of old
 I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning
 Or ever the earth was.
 When there were no depths, I was brought forth,
 When there were no fountains abounding with water.
 Before the mountains were settled
 Before the hills, was I brought forth:
 While as yet he had not made the earth
 Nor the fields
 Nor the beginning of the dust of the world . . ."

Then recall the Word that "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", and this extract from The Proverbs will make us realize something of the timelessness of God's wisdom that conceived and foresaw His Son and the majestic glory of that wisdom that was manifested in the flesh of His Son who was born in due time. By such a study as this our knowledge of the Father is broadened and our conception of Jesus is enlarged. The conclusion of Proverbs 8 is relevant to this theme of study:

"Now therefore, my sons, hearken unto me:
 For blessed are they that keep my ways.
 Hear instruction and be wise,
 And refuse it not.
 Blessed is the man that heareth me,
 watching daily at my gates,
 Waiting at the posts of my doors.
 For whoso findeth me findeth life;
 And shall obtain favour of the Lord."

Aids to Study

It is a good scheme to study an Old Testament book and then a New, and after a study, say of the Proverbs, it would be instructive to read of the Son, who was the supreme manifestation of the wisdom of the Father, in Mark's Gospel account. This record is short enough to be read easily at one sitting, and from such a reading one can absorb a composite picture of Jesus in a way never experienced before.

No one, and nothing should come between the Bible and you in your first concentrated reading and study; for this is one of the ways in which you trim, adorn, or beautify the lamp, which is the Word, as illustrated in the parable of the wise and foolish virgins. Later, when you have noted the difficulties you would like to solve, it would be useful to read the thoughts of others, and on Mark helpful works are *The Gospel of the Son of God** and *The Gospel of Mark**.

Following the study of a Gospel, you may find it illuminating to study a prophetic book such as Ezekiel, and after a careful reading and study some difficulties could be cleared up by a reading of *The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel**. If you followed such a plan your studies would become orderly, spiritually instructive and inspiring. You would be getting somewhere in your divine education.

After the study of a prophetic book you could return to the New Testament to study an epistle. One that is unique in that it does not deal with ecclesial problems, but is the sum of all that is best in Paul's inspired writing, is the Epistle to the Ephesians. To read this through at one sitting is to understand Paul's intention more clearly, for beginning with the origin, status and glory of the saint, he draws out the implications of these things in relation to daily living. For reading and study *The Modern Reader's Bible* would be helpful and for further reading, *Portrait of the Saint** and *Letter to the Ephesians**.

The Use of Bibles

It will be noticed that several Bibles have been mentioned. There are different Bibles for different purposes. It is a long established tradition to use the Authorized Version for ecclesial readings, although some ecclesias have long used the Revised Version which is easily the best for accuracy and for studious reading of the Scriptures. *The Modern Reader's Bible* is based on the Revised Version.

A very useful Bible for a comparison of the A.V. and the R.V. is the Interlinear Bible, particularly for the keen student of the Scriptures, but it is not easy to read aloud from this version, especially when there is a succession of small print comparisons. The Revised Standard Version which has retained the style of the Revised Version makes for easy reading. No bookshelf should be without the New English Bible.

Whatever Bible is used it provides our education for eternal life, our guide through the perplexing problems of daily living, our strength, and comfort in the infirmities of life, and our vision of a time and experience which not even the Bible can adequately convey, even though it can hint at their glory: "Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them and they shall be his people and God himself shall be with them, and be their God." Who can tell the blessings hidden there!

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Chapter 19 THE PROBLEMS OF LIFE

THE new life is a wonderful life: it is one of majestic vision; of mighty purposes, and of unsurpassed worth. There are times when we see these things of the spirit so clearly and in such beauty that we are uplifted by them and can sympathize with the feelings of the Apostle Paul who wrote of a time when "he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words which it is not lawful for a man to utter". But these moments of exaltation are all too rare.

There are other times when we become depressed and dispirited and all the spiritual warmth goes out of our lives and we wonder what has gone wrong, and why we have lost our zest and enthusiasm for the things of God. But if the Apostle Paul had his moments of exaltation, like us he had his periods of depression when he could write: "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, yet not in despair; cast down but not destroyed." This is the rhythm and the anguish of the spiritual life; the struggle against the tug of evil, when we would do good.

Few of us will lay down our heads in our last dreamless sleep (if Jesus has not returned) without having been faced with difficulties of one kind or another.

Problems will differ in their nature according to one's character and temperament. What seems to be an insurmountable problem to one, may be of little consequence to another. Because of this, when we are asked to help another who is in difficulty, it is dangerous to assume that his attitude to the problem will be the same as ours. Therefore, we must strive to be clear about the strength of his feelings about it. Thus sympathetic discussion of the issues involved may prove of immense help to both parties.

What are the Problems?

Problems beset brethren and sisters of all ages. In the modern "permissive" society it is all too easy for a young brother or sister to get into serious trouble, as was pointed out in an earlier chapter. The crisis arises when the young one realizes the enormity of the sin in the sight of the Father; and unless some one is available to ease the burden, the sense of guilt may be so strong as to cause him to commit spiritual suicide by turning away from the Truth.

In the case of older brethren and sisters one would think that years of experience in the Faith would be a safeguard against serious difficulties arising: but the spiritual life is not like that. We need to be constant in prayer, consistent in practical fellowship, regular in Bible study and unfailing in attendance at the memorial feast. Then, at least, we may be able to cope with the troubles that will still come.

A distressing problem that may almost overwhelm one for a time is not so much a complete loss of one's first love, but a serious weakening of that love because of a staleness which may infect one's spiritual life. This can happen to an ecclesia too, which, with "a little folding of the hands", can placidly settle back to receiving the Father's spiritual gifts and doing little or nothing in return.

What is particularly dispiriting in such a situation is that one may reach the stage when very few meetings satisfy. Exhortations, though clearly expounded, may not meet one's personal needs. Sunday evening "lectures" though well presented for the visitors (who unfortunately are so rarely present) have little appeal for the saint who cries out for spiritual sustenance; and Bible class talks, whilst they may inform and instruct, do not arouse an active spiritual response. In such a situation one can despair of finding a renewal of love for the faith.

The Make-up of an Ecclesia

These differences in response to faith will arise because each ecclesia is made up of highly individual members: people who have said "No!" to the thinking and the ways of the world and have separated themselves from it. But because they have joined a body which participates in a fellowship of the spirit between the Father, Son and one another, they should be all the more sensitive to the feelings and problems of others, sharing their burdens and seeking their help. Such should never be guilty of gossip, slander, or unkindness, but should be seen to be trustworthy.

For example, a spinster sister may be so from choice, from lack of opportunity in meeting a suitable brother, or because of the sacrifice of refusing to marry one to whom she was greatly attracted, because of his lack of response to the Truth. Such a sacrifice for the Lord is to be immensely admired and ought never to be made the

occasion for a joke about being "on the shelf". Who knows the hurt that can result from this; or the magnitude of the offence against Christ's "little ones"?

In an ecclesia too, members differ not only in education, profession or occupations, but in temperament and in constitutional health. There will be the physically strong and healthy who are seemingly capable of meeting and coping with any problem. There are those who are far from strong in health and there may be some who are so highly strung and nervously poised that the developing responsibilities of family and ecclesial life bring an increasing number of problems.

Someone whose nervous system is stretched almost to its limit, may be so burdened with problems at work that he (or she) may be too tired and dispirited to cope with the tasks and problems that face him at home; and family and ecclesial life may be seriously disturbed. It is of little use for such a brother (or sister) to be told "to snap out of it" or to be exhorted "You ought to have more faith". The case needs far more serious concern and help than that.

There are others who are so reserved in outlook and manner that they are almost anti-social in their desire to keep to themselves: sometimes a husband and wife may be so wrapped up in each other that when something serious happens to one of them, the other is, for some time, incapable of thinking clearly or of coming to decisions on necessary actions. The situation is aggravated by the reluctance of the reserved brother or sister to "bother" other members of the ecclesia.

Finally there are the ever present problems of sickness, disease and old age. These are sometimes faced with courage and true faith, and sometimes with increasing complaint and loss of faith.

What are the Solutions?

There will be many other problems and difficulties that the followers of Jesus must face and they all ought to be our continuing concern. But in what ways can they be solved, if at all? And how can we all help? For in the new life we have not only to learn how to face difficulties, but also to offer ourselves for a spiritual training that will aid us to understand and to help others.

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We came out of a morally cold world into the spiritual warmth of the life in Christ, and one of the first lessons that we ought to learn is that its fellowship is not the name of an association, is not an abstract theory, but a living, vital, practical sharing in a common life and purpose. To attempt to live to ourselves is a negation of fellowship. We are a household of saints to be filled with the love of God and of people.

The Apostle John, who wrote that "our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ" and added "If we walk in the light, as God is in the light, we have fellowship one with another . . ." frequently drives home the teaching that we belong to a family which shares and serves. Hence we should examine our lives in their daily pattern to see that we are not denying this doctrine, but are prepared, in practice, "to lay down our lives for the brethren".

However well we learn principles, even a saint will sin, sometimes grievously. Because of their immaturity and inexperience the young may walk a more dangerous path than the rest. But those who are older must not only be prepared to forgive, as they are forgiven by the Father, but they must be a refuge to whom the young can turn when in trouble. But to how many can they turn? Often to no one in the ecclesia because there is no brother or sister whose light so brightly shines with compassion and understanding that they are certain of a sympathetic and confidential hearing.

There should be, and could be, more saints in ecclesias who have so caught the spirit of Jesus that young people will naturally turn to them for help and advice in time of trouble. Such a role is always blessed, for to save a fellow-sinner from greater folly is always an act worthy of a follower of our Master.

Talking it Out

When one is in trouble or facing a problem, it is a good thing to talk it out with someone; and there can be no doubt where to start-with the Father. If He was interested enough to record the tears of the Psalmist in His "book" we can be certain that He will listen to our troubles, even though sometimes we may feel that we are not "getting through" to Him.

Besides talking it out with the Father, it is a proper function of our fellowship to discuss matters with others also, whose duty it is to listen sympathetically. It may be found, for instance in the case of staleness and lack of enthusiasm in spiritual things, that others, too, have gone through a similar experience; an exchange of thought about it may benefit all. And if a sufficient number feel strongly about the problem it may, in time, lead to changes in ecclesial arrangements. To a greater or lesser extent we are all victims of traditions which are not always suited to our time, or our needs.

As for our spinster sisters (or bachelor brothers!) we ought to cherish them and help them to fill their lives with spiritual interests and activities that will assist them to fill the void that family life would have done. Such saints have the unique opportunity to give heart-free service to the Lord Jesus in a way that is impossible to a married brother or sister. And there is no reason why ecclesial meetings should be the only outlet for spiritual vigour. Do not we know each other well in our homes?

What of the brother or sister who is nervously stretched to the limit? Are we content to let him (or her) "go it alone" after a few attempts to talk? Is this pastoral care? Or are we prepared, regularly if necessary, patiently to sit for an hour or two just to listen to the frustrations that bring him to the edge of a complete breakdown; praying

with him, offering sensible advice, getting the help of others in the ecclesia-making it a family matter-so that the husband and wife can escape the cares of home and children for an evening.

If there are repair or other jobs to be done in the home that lie heavily on the conscience of a brother who feels inadequate to deal with them, surely, whilst there are the necessary speakers, shepherds and teachers in the ecclesia, there will also be the carpenters, plasterers and electricians who can do such work of the Lord and transform the lives of the troubled? This is fellowship, this is pastoral care, this is the love of God, and of the brethren.

Throughout the years there have been ecclesias who have suffered tragic loss in the suicide of a brother. To what dreadful stress are such subjected before the end? Could we have saved them if we had done more? If they had been certain that our telephones, our time, our help, our warm fellowship would have been available at any time of day or night (a service which a group known as the Samaritans try to provide) would it have helped them through their crisis? We do not know, but we ought to realize that we have a great responsibility for the care of each other in time of trouble, and we, more than any, ought to be assured that the loving arms of the Lord are around us, through the brethren. We still have a lot to learn!

Our Task

As a body we can garner money, experience and vigour in preaching the Gospel: and we are quick to help where there is serious illness, or when hospital visiting is needed. But there are so many troubles and problems that are neither as obvious nor as easy, and that need patience over long periods. And there is no better recipe for meeting one's own frustrations than to be active in helping others to cope with theirs.

It is never too late for us, individually and ecclesially, to widen and deepen our spiritual education and fellowship so that we are the better able to feed Christ's lambs, filling the lives of the lonely with companionship, the homes of the aged with the warmth of youthful service, and the minds of those who are anxious, troubled or strained, with the assurance of all the help that they may need.

We belong to the greatest family in the universe; the family at whose head stands the Almighty Father, at whose side is the unique Son, in whose keeping is a host of saints among whom we are blessed to be numbered. Therefore, all our thoughts, all our actions, all our decisions ought to take into account the kind of people we are so that nothing will be said or done that will needlessly offend others.

Paul once exhorted that the saints should be "imitators of God as beloved children", and if we strive to respond to this call we shall indeed be a happy people for, helping one another in our problems we shall show the love, compassion, mercy and grace that has always been manifested to us by the Father, for

"He does not deal with us according to our sins,
nor requite us according to our iniquities.

For as the heavens are high above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;

As far as the east is from the west,
so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear him.

For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust."

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Chapter 20 THE FORGOTTEN DOCTRINE

OUR call and entry into the new life are based upon eternal principles which the Father expects His children to apply in their daily lives. Because these divine laws are timeless in their application not even twentieth-century knowledge can invalidate them. But what are these principles? And what of God who revealed them?

One has only to think of the vastness of space, the gigantic multiplicity of galaxies of stars and the magnificence and beauties of some of the seascapes and landscapes on earth to realize the wonder of God's creation. To us these may sometimes appear to be His true glory-but not to Him!

When the Israelites heard coming from mount Sinai the thunders and lightnings, the voice of a trumpet "exceeding loud", and saw the thick cloud and the mount "altogether on a smoke because the Lord descended upon it in fire", it might have appeared to them as a manifestation of the great glory of the Lord-but not to Him!

Creation and all its best manifestations are but offshoots of a divine tree of life whose power lies in a spiritual fruit which exceeds all else in glory; for when Moses said, "Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, shew me now thy ways, that I may know thee ... I beseech thee, shew me thy glory," the Lord said, "I will make all my goodness pass before thee."

Whilst the heavenly hosts of stars and the earthly beauties of nature may stir our emotions, they are silent about our deepest needs and are heedless of our cries for help. When the Lord passed before Moses He proclaimed not the great wonders of His power but: "The Lord, the Lord, a God full of compassion and gracious, slow to anger and plenteous in mercy and truth."

From thenceforward the purpose of the law and the prophets was to shew this knowledge of God so that His people might trust in Him with all their heart and not lean upon their own understanding. With the warning of Israel's decline before them Judah was told, through Jeremiah: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgment and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord."

This is the transcendent glory of the Father, who created the angels through immeasurable time; clothed Adam and Eve with skins; cared for His people Israel; prepared for the coming of His Son, and has called a people for His greater glory, as many as the stars of heaven.

The Glory of the Son

Because we have come to know this compassionate Father, we now understand what John meant when he wrote of the Son: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory as of the only begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth."

At an appropriate stage in His revelation of signs and law to Moses, the Lord revealed His true glory, and at an appropriate stage at the beginning of his ministry the Son, Jesus, made clear its nature and purpose. You will remember the occasion when he did this. He returned to Nazareth where he had been brought up, and as had been his custom before he left his "home-town" he stood up to read in the synagogue on the sabbath. Whether he looked for the special portion of Isaiah that he wished to read or whether his eye fell immediately on this part of the scroll we do not know, but what he read was: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor: He hath sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."

The heavens must ring with the praises of a God and Father whose very nature is love and selfless service to the creatures of His creation. No wonder the name of Jesus is above every name in heaven and earth, when it is realized that the whole motive and purpose of his life was "to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many". He asked nothing of anyone and strove only to reveal his Father's goodness to all. That is why he could truly say "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father".

Grace and Truth Exemplified

Out of the many incidents in the ministry of Jesus that illustrate this eternal principle of grace and truth we can

stay with but a few. He toured Galilee "preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people". As his Father's Son, he could not have done otherwise, for had not the nation of Israel been born of the grace and truth of the Father? Thus it was his "meat", likewise, to do the will of his Father, and "to finish his work".

Sorrow came to Jesus, as to others; and he would feel it more keenly than anyone for he knew the power of sin and of death. But he never allowed it to hinder his mission of mercy. He might weep at his loss, but soon turned again to the work in hand. And so it was in the tragic death of John the Baptist, at the hands of king Herod. It was the tune, too, when he received the report of the apostles about all the things that they had done and taught in obedience to the mission on which he had sent them. They were probably happy but exhausted. "For there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat."

Retiring, by ship, to a desert place, Jesus and the disciples obviously hoped that they would enjoy rest and privacy, but such was the power of Jesus that the people could not bear to lose sight of him and those who saw him leave gathered more people from neighbouring towns and they all ran round the lake seeking him.

In spite of his fatigue Jesus could not resist the hunger of the multitude, and his Father's nature shines through his response to their coming: "And Jesus, when he came out saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and he began to teach them many things." But having served the needs of their inner man, he soon satisfied also their physical desire for food. Thus, again, was grace and truth fed to the hungry.

This twin, and eternal principle, obviously implies a selflessness of will that strengthens the weakest of personalities for service to others, and bends the strongest will to the deepest needs of men. And could there have been a better illustration of this than the incident of the washing of the disciples' feet?

It took place during (R.V.) the Passover feast which Judas left to betray Jesus. Whilst he was still there, and before partaking of haroseth which was a kind of hors (Toeuve to the Passover lamb, it was customary for all at the feast to wash their hands so that they could dip the sop (piece of bread) into the haroseth with clean hands. Jesus laid aside his outer garments, took a towel, poured water into a basin and then did the menial task of a slave-washed their feet, thus expressing his complete humility before them.

When he had completed his self-imposed task, and had sat down at the table with them he said: "Know ye not what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet: ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you."

Grace and Truth made Perfect

The last incident that illustrates this divine principle of service is the most extraordinary of all. A solitary figure stood at dawn on the shore of "the sea of Tiberias" waiting the return of the disciple-fishermen who had toiled all night and had caught nothing. He had already spent some time preparing "a fire of coals" (a charcoal fire), and a fish and bread were already cooking on it. When the tired fishermen were gladdened by the miraculous draught of fishes which they caught at his command "Jesus then cometh and taketh bread and giveth them, and fish likewise".

This Jesus, who still so humbly and lovingly served, was not the one who had to face the cross; not the one of our flesh and our infirmities; but he who was alive for evermore -who now had the full exercise of authority in heaven and on earth, and the judgment of all mankind, and whose name was raised by his Father above every name in heaven or on earth. Thus was grace and truth made perfect; and in his mortality and immortality Jesus exemplified the eternal Godhead in compassion, grace, long-suffering, mercy and truth.

This practical application of the divine principle was made possible in the life of Jesus only because of his absolute submission to the will of his Father. It meant the abandonment of self-will in addition to the carrying of his cross. If we are to realize the hope of the life immortal, exactly the same is expected of us.

Doctrinal Foundations

Traditionally, we rest our doctrinal foundations upon the twin pillars of "The things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ". There was another pillar on which the life of Jesus was founded-the one that we have been discussing, and although he stated it quite clearly we have, at most, made it but an incidental

part of his teaching, which it is not: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." The Greek word translated "deny" is a very strong one: "to deny utterly; to abjure; to affirm that one has no connexion with a person" (in this case, to have no connexion with one's former will).

It follows from this that we should begin the new life not only with a sound knowledge of "The things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ", but with the added pillar: "The things concerning the renunciation of self-will" which the writers of the New Testament epistles so thoroughly survey.

Because it implies such a radical psychological transformation of one's thinking and character, this can easily become the forgotten doctrine: we would prefer it pushed to the background of our beliefs. But as it was fundamental to the whole teaching and life of Jesus, so it is to ours. In some ways the carrying of a daily cross is an easier burden than facing the steady but resolute task of completely abandoning one's own will and throughout life asserting the will of God so that constantly we are able to say "Thy will be done".

It is the assertion of self-will that leads to the neglect of attendance at meetings; it is the fulfillment of one's own desires that leads to want of service to others, and it is the gratification of one's own pleasures that leads to lack of time either "to feed the flock of God" or "to preach the gospel to the poor". These weaknesses are possible in the lives of every one of us if we forget this fundamental doctrine of self-denial whose fruit is the grace and truth so characteristic of the Father and expected of His children.

When self-denial truly works in us we shall manifest the compassion, grace, long-suffering, mercy and truth that Jesus so clearly exemplified and if we look around us with his discernment we, too, shall be moved with compassion at the sight of so many who are "as sheep not having a shepherd". Thus the warmth of the spirit will not only take the chill out of the hearts of some in the world, but preserve the fellowship of the saints in the ecclesia.

We need to look critically into our own minds and to examine the motives in our own wills. We may be dismayed to find how lacking we are in some of the fruits of the spirit which are the result of the nurture of self-denial. You will remember them: "Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." Can we mark each of them and say, "Amen"? If not, we should pray for forgiveness and resolve to try again.

Our lives must be founded upon these three pillars of doctrine: The things concerning the name of Jesus; the renunciation of self; and the kingdom of God. If they are, we shall stand as immortals in the dawn of a new age, to begin, under Jesus, the rule of the nations in grace and in truth.

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Chapter 21 THE GOLDEN MEAN

JESUS was the supreme example of how to get on with people and how to be temperate in conduct and expression. In any situation, however serious, he leaves us with the impression of a calm, balanced, reasonable person. All but those who wished for his death were attracted to him. The aged and children, the beggar and rich ruler, the sinner and the righteous: all were at ease in his company, for they seemed to know that with him they would find truth, tranquillity, compassion and forgiveness. What was his secret?

As we have already seen, he had wrestled with, and conquered, the desires of self-will—a battle that goes on in us throughout our lives—and he obeyed only the will of his Father. His one aim was to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. To take the words of the Apostle Paul he led a "tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and gravity", and near the end of his ministry bequeathed to his disciples what he called "my peace".

If we are to follow Jesus it must be through his temperament, as well as his teaching: his serenity and balanced conduct must, if possible, be made our virtues. If he could ever be called unrestrained it was in his love and compassion for people: he held out to them helping hands. It is in such a spirit that we shall be at ease with people and that everyone will feel at ease in our company.

This puts the consideration of others first, so that in our dealings with people, whether it be in the fellowship of the spirit, or with those not of the faith, we shall be able to discuss any problems or difficulties in a temperate manner. This can be achieved if the peace of Jesus is ever-present in our minds, and a spiritual moderation of language is always evident on our tongues.

This kind of relationship with people is only possible if we are wise in the things of the Spirit; and James has told us of the source of such strength: "The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits without partiality, and without hypocrisy." He knew what he was writing about; it was not an impractical ideal but the qualities of one who was the perfect pattern of such conduct—his own brother, Jesus!

Writing to the Philippians, Paul wanted their moderation (forbearance, R.V.) to be known to all men⁴ because he knew what a harmonizing influence this could be, and when, writing to the Corinthians, he used the figure of men striving for mastery in the games, he stressed that they had to be temperate, self-restrained in all things. If they could be so disciplined for a corruptible crown, how much the more should we be temperate in spiritual things? Because we seek an incorruptible crown. That was the point of his exhortation.

This disciplined, balanced, serene life is exemplified in Jesus, and is the constant exhortation of the New Testament writers. Their portrait of the saint who seeks this wisdom from above, is of one who is a student of the "holy scriptures which are able to make him wise unto salvation" and is prepared to lay down his life for the brethren. Those who are virtuous in these ways are temperate in all things. But there are some things about which we sometimes tend to be far from moderate.

The Study of the Scriptures

To a greater or lesser extent we are all students of the Scriptures. Most of us fail to seek its wisdom to the degree that we should, but some pursue it with a deep absorption and enthusiasm. There has never been a deeper or more learned student of the Word than Jesus, even as a boy, but his use of it was relevant to the occasion, penetrating in judgment and restrained in utterance. Almost everything he said was coloured by its spirit and its prophecies, always uttered with an authoritative yet sweet reasonableness, except in the presence of hypocrites with whom he was scathing. These are the qualities that should be characteristic of us in all our communion with people.

It is very easy to become so enthusiastic over one's studies and spiritual discoveries as to be obsessed with them and to be unaware that one is arrogant and intolerant of any other view. It is by such excess of enthusiasm that we may, in the eyes of those not of the faith, discredit the Scriptures and weaken our witness of the Lord's true word.

However well we may study the Scriptures most of us need the help provided by more competent students and more use ought to be made of such help. But we should be very careful not to replace first-hand study of the

Word, or to elevate the Bible aid above its proper function.

No one who has studied the works of Dr. Thomas can ever remain but deeply in his debt. Too many are still unacquainted with Elpis Israel and Eureka. Anyone who has studied these works, even if only partially, will be the better for it. And how many have read the life of Brother Thomas, to know something of the selfless sacrifices that he made, and the endless disputations in which he was engaged in his defence of the Gospel? These are all invaluable helps, but there are also other aids and ways of Scripture study, and to become obsessed with one may lead to one becoming intemperate to such an extent as to cause dissension in an ecclesia and to weaken true fellowship.

The example of Jesus is relevant. In discussion, the learned doctors or teachers of his day were fond of quoting from rabbinical commentaries accumulated over centuries, and it is fair to assume that Jesus knew something of these even as a boy when he asked and answered questions in the temple which may well have included reference to such commentaries. Yet during his ministry we do not find him referring to any writings but "the Law and the Prophets" with the exception, perhaps, of his reference to the tradition of the elders in Matt. 15 and Mark 7. His Father's Word was in his mouth and no other. Thus even when we express our thanks to the living who help us, and for the sleeping doctor who has been the guide of so many-it is the Word that must be our stay and guide-and a calm moderation that must be our conduct.

Fellowship in the Ecclesias

Fellowship is a wonderful means of communion, partnership and sharing with the members of a family whose Head is God, the Father, and whose Son is the Lord Jesus. Several times during his ministry he identified his followers as his brethren, and after his resurrection he said to the women who were on their way to tell the disciples of the empty tomb: "Go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me." By reason of this fact that we belong to a divine family we ought to be the more careful what we say and do in relation to our brethren (or sisters) who should come first in our responsibilities. And if what we have to say in writing an essay for a Bible class, or in speaking from a platform is likely to offend, then we ought not to write or say it, and if our message is one of a critical, yet exhortative nature, then it ought to come from the Scripture and not from personal feelings.

Sometimes ideas in the interpretation of scientific or other matters, or of Scripture, may be suitable for a small circle who may be capable of understanding the ideas propounded, but may be easily misunderstood if presented to a congregation among whom are many who would require more time than the moment of delivery to assimilate what is being said. A proper judgment of the occasion is called for: and the happiness and welfare of the whole family should come first.

Whilst Jesus was equal to the profundities of the scribes and Pharisees, his teaching to the common people was simple and straightforward. It was clear and direct and the true seeker of divine knowledge would have had little difficulty in understanding it. Unfortunately pride is part of the make-up of most of us, and we may often become so obsessed with a special theory that we feel we have discovered that we are impelled to impart it to others, whether that be wise or not.

Paul has some good advice to offer us here. In his first letter to the Corinthians he wrote about meat which had been "offered" to idols and he discussed whether it should be eaten if someone knew that it had been so offered. His answer was that it should not be eaten if it disturbed the eater's conscience, otherwise there was no harm in it, because "we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and there is none other God but one". Then he went on to establish a spiritual principle: "Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend (stumble) I will eat, no flesh while the world standeth (R.V. for evermore)." Would that we could obey this principle of love and fellowship towards our brethren, more perfectly.

Our Faith in the World

We need the strength of this fellowship in the world of today, which is Corinthian in its permissiveness and childlike in the ease with which it is deceived by slogans and plausible theories.

Once most people saw "the finger of God" in human affairs, but few do today. It is fashionable for so many to say, and believe, that "God is dead" because as "the ground of our being" He is no longer in heaven, "up there"

as the Bible teaches. Thus for the majority of people "Science is God"¹³ and The General Theory of Evolution is its doctrine.

For many scientists and the man in the street the evolution of life, including man, has become a fact which influences the life and destiny of the human race. Dr. Julian Huxley put it this way: "We biologists shall fail in our social duty if we did not manage to ensure that evolution and the evolutionary outlook on human affairs and human destiny become an important element in the mental equipment of our nation."¹⁴ This outlook he has helped more than any other man to publicize in Encyclopedias, Schools, Radio and Television throughout the English-speaking world. The creed of this outlook was stated by him in the lines:

"The Universe which can live and work and plan
At last made God within the mind of Man."

Whilst theologians, too, may accept the theory of evolution as a possible explanation of the way God "created" or "evolved" life in all its varieties, then- theistic addition to the theory does nothing to influence scientists and others in their general conception of the theory in which (to them) God is not needed.

This is where the saints of God need to be very cautious and temperate, especially the young ones, so as not to be led astray. In the Scriptures the Father has not shown us the slightest evidence that He has worked in an evolutionary way from the single source of life. Throughout history, where man is concerned, He has been a constant factor in shaping his destiny and at times has influenced his future in decisive ways: in the Flood, at Sodom and Gomorrah, in the creation of the nation of Israel and above all in the resurrection of His Son.

Far from being subject to an invariable evolutionary principle established when life began on earth, man has, throughout his history been subject to the judgments of God which have decisively changed the direction of his journey through time. And as the Psalmist pointed out, these judgments have been based on a long-term divine principle: "The wicked shall be turned into hell (sheol) and all nations that forget God."

This principle has not been an invariable one, for God has dealt with nations on a short-term basis, too. Because of her special relationship to her Creator, Israel was, at times, punished severely for her sins, but many other nations have come under the judgments of God for their moral aberrations and their excesses in the treatment of their underprivileged, captives or slaves. The cases cited by Amos are but illustrative of the messages to nations given by other prophets also.

The extent to which God has been concerned with man's journey through history is seen in the fact that He reserved the right to judge nations, and to reverse judgment, according to the circumstances of their situation at any point in time: "At what instant I shall speak concerning a kingdom, to pluck it up and to pull down and to destroy it; if that nation . . . turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them." Nineveh and Israel more than once experienced the merciful hand of God and we have every reason to believe that it is these principles which have always influenced the course of men and nations, rather than a life-principle which by its very nature would not need the constant and varying guidance of a Creator closely concerned with the destiny of man.

In any case there are still biologists who make frank admissions in their evaluation of their research regarding the origin and development of life: "The evidence that supports the General Theory of Evolution from a single source is not sufficiently strong to allow us to consider it as anything more than a working hypothesis"

Trust in God

The "hypothesis" with which every seeker of truth begins, that the finger of God has pointed out the destiny of man, soon becomes a fact of experience, for we know that the Father "rules in the kingdom of men" and that His peace reigns in our hearts. No modifications are necessary in our spiritual research, for this fact becomes more assured the more faithfully we place our trust in Him, because He "is the Saviour of all men, specially of those who believe".

In the meantime we should continue to submit ourselves in complete trust to the will of our Father for "he dwelleth in us and his love is perfected in us". Therefore, we should be the more steady and temperate in the life

of the Spirit; more adult and mature in our appreciation of the Word of Truth; and more protective of the faith of our brethren, so that "we may be no longer children tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine ... but speaking truth in love may grow up in all things unto him, which is the head, even Christ".

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Chapter 22 OUR GOD AND FATHER

WE DELIGHT in the revelation of God's wisdom given to us in the Scriptures and thankfully ponder His gracious love in rescuing us from our sin-stricken nature. With awe we realize what He must have suffered in seeing His beloved Son nailed to a cross; and with hearts full of gratitude we praise Him for the vision He has given us of the things that are to be in the glorious Kingdom which He is to establish through His Son. But how much do we know of Him and how close to Him are we in our life in the spirit?

He Alone Created

It is amazing how much He has told us about Himself: most of it would have been beyond human conception or comprehension if He had not bestowed on us the blessing of His revelation which answers so many questions. So many things that we take for granted in the Bible are a proof of its divine inspiration.

A child likes to pose hard problems to parents: questions that push the existence of things farther and farther back in time until there comes the question: "Who made God?" or "Who was before God?" Only God could answer that kind of question, and He does so in the Scriptures: He says: "I am the Lord that maketh all things; that stretcheth forth the heavens alone; that spreadeth abroad the earth by myself. . ." And to show the quality of His greatness, and His power He declares: "I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done . . ." Where else could such divine assurance be found, and in what book or religion could such proofs as He has provided, be seen?

At a distance in time that is beyond human thought, God once existed alone; that is the sense of Genesis 1:1. "In the beginning God (Elohim) created the heavens and the earth." Whilst Elohim is a plural form it can, depending on its context or the verb that goes with it, be understood as singular. Thus "The Hebrew word 'created' is in the singular and precludes any idea that its subject Elohim is to be understood in a plural sense".

It was the marvellous wisdom of God alone that created "the dust of the world", the atoms, the infinitesimal whirling universes that carry His mighty power; too small to be seen by the naked eye; too fast and too elusive to be trapped in their motion by the most powerful electron microscope, through which they can be seen only as a flash across a screen. Yet such atoms went into the making of each star or planet, as well as into every physical manifestation of animate and inanimate life. And in the whole of creation there is an order which is so mathematical in character that it makes it possible for men to land a spaceship on the moon with a greater accuracy in timing than is sometimes possible in a train journey.

This is the kind of God of power that He is, and it is quite impossible for us to express in words the majesty of a Creator whose Universe is so vast that it has been estimated that there are probably 60,000 million galaxies (groups of millions of stars) spread out in space, one of them being the "blanket" of stars which we see at night and which we know as the Milky Way. Our solar system is part of this galaxy.

God and Man

The tune came that on one tiny planet, earth, in this vast sea of galaxies God (Elohim) created man. By this time God was no longer alone: a host of immortals had become part of His expanding glory; the angels were His worshipping servants and messengers, hence the revelation: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness . . ."

In spite of so much evidence of the awesome majesty of God, and of the beauty and glory of His creation, Adam and Eve sinned: a proof of how easy it is for man to become so rooted in earthly desires as to forget that He is there; that He sees and hears all; that there is not a thought in our minds, or a word on our tongues that He is ignorant of; nor a sparrow that falls, or a hair on one's head that is outside His knowledge. This is the extent of His power, for He does inhabit every atom!

The creation of Adam foreshadowed the true man in the image and likeness of Elohim, the last Adam, Jesus, the Christ. And out of all the suffering, joys and sorrows of mankind came the one who was to lead a host out of the Egypt of sin "to sit with him in the heavenly places".

In a world in which the desires of men are supreme, and the wishes and disciplines of God count for little or nothing, we need, more than the saints of any age, to be on our guard against our minds becoming rooted in the attitudes of the modern world. We need to lift our eyes "unto the hills from whence cometh our help" and our

minds to the God who made us, so that we may be still and know that "The Lord of hosts is with us".

Few of us rise to such a realization of the majesty, power and might of the Lord that it fills our hearts with a fear to offend Him in any word or deed. And all of us will fall short of the "weight of glory" which is ours now, in this life, in that God, our Father, has chosen us to join "the many sons" of whom His beloved Son is the first-born.

Israel knew God by the majestic name Yahweh: the name which defined Him as He is, and as He will be in His developing purposes; the name which promised increasing glories of manifestation and love; the name which was above every name. Yet such was His abundant grace, through Jesus, that all who are born into the new life become His adopted sons, privileged to call Him by an even higher name: Father.

Unity in the Father

Seen against this majestic, divine conception of love and grace we must often appear to our Father as disobedient, extremely weak spiritual personalities, shoddy in our spiritual work. Yet as in the case of Israel He continues to love and forgive us so that we might learn to love and forgive others: for we are members of a closely-knit divine family.

How closely-knit are the ties of the spiritual life Jesus exemplified in his life and teaching. And he shows us the way by the examples of his abiding love to his Father and to those whom he came to save. He exhorts us to a close and warm fellowship with the Father and with him. Recall John 17 in which he emphasizes the spirit and harmony of this relationship: "Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one even as we are." And note, too, his concern for those who were not yet born into his Father's family: "Neither pray I for these alone but also for them which shall believe on me through their (the disciples') word; that they all may be one; as thou Father art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us."

It was at an inconceivably distant time when God, alone, in His wisdom planned the Universe, and long ages to the Kingdom, and the perfect consummation of the all in all beyond it! The fact that this divine plan has included our elevation to the high spiritual status of being sons of God, a status far beyond our worth or deserving, should make us regret our sins and our weaknesses in "dust and ashes"; and should humble our pride to nothing; that is, if we have any spiritual imagination at all!

Being dignified by such a high, divine honour, we should make it our bounden duty to discover what the Father's plan is- how it has worked out thus far; what He wishes and needs us to do; and for what purposes He desires us to work. This is what Bible study is for, and if we fail to do this, we can remain ignorant of what He is working out, and of what our part in it is. It is an individual and a corporate (ecclesial) task. It is a fellowship or partnership not only of family communion but of work and of purpose.

The Father Cares

We shall achieve little or nothing if we rely on our own strength: disappointment, frustration and sorrows lie ahead if we so try. But we shall succeed if we remember the kind of Father He is. Inhabiting every atom, knowing its every movement and position, will He fail to hear our prayers, will He lack the love fully to use the services of His angels to minister to our needs?

To Moses He revealed the quality of His glory: "The Lord, the Lord, a God full of compassion and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy and truth; keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin . . ." And in spite of centuries of the disobedience of Israel He could still, remembering His covenants, say to Israel: "I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee (with bonds of love, Hosea 11: 4). Again I will build thee, and thou shalt be built, O virgin of Israel."

That is the kind of God He has always been; that is the kind of Father He is to us. Peter knew from experience that he could always draw on His love; that is why he wrote: "Cast all your anxiety upon him because he careth for you."

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Chapter 23 OUR LORD AND SAVIOUR

WHILST God, our Father, has in the Scriptures revealed something of His Majesty, power and holiness in His Universe, and in His love and compassion for men, we see and understand Him best through His well-beloved Son, who lived so closely to his Father in prayer, in life and in his teaching that he could truly say to Philip: "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father."

Even a superficial study of the Scriptures will show that God not only revealed the glory of His compassion, grace, mercy and truth to Moses, but manifested them to the nation of Israel whose people were, more often than not, "stiff-necked and impudent." Like his Father, Jesus manifested the same qualities to the righteous and the sinner alike.

Immediately after his baptism and his temptation in the wilderness, Jesus began his ministry with a declaration of his mission so that men might see that his character and work had been foretold by his Father.

The declaration came from a prophecy through Isaiah, which Jesus read at his home synagogue: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor (meek, humble); he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord."

Selfless Service

In God, the Father, in His angels, and in Jesus there is the same characteristic of selfless service: it is of the very nature of immortals in the Universe, and the grandeur of the task to which saints have been called is that it is a partnership in which the Father believes they are capable of participating. This had been made clear to the angels, otherwise the one on Patmos could never have said to John: "I am a fellow-servant with thee and with thy brethren . . ."

In the first century anyone knowing God and living in expectation of the Messiah (as in the case of the wise men seeking the babe, Jesus) would look for one who manifested the divine graces of love and service. And those who received Jesus recognized these qualities in him. Throughout his ministry he made clear by his words and deeds that he had come to serve. He crystallized his whole purpose in the words: "The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give . . ." To give: this was Jesus manifesting the love and compassion of his Father; not willing that any repentant sinner should perish, and ready to give his most precious possession of all-his life-as a ransom for those who would follow him.

Jesus sought sinners who were humbly repentant: he was not interested in the self-righteous egotist. And on those who sought him he lavished the compassion, grace, mercy and truth which his Father had manifested to Israel. He never refused the sincere appeal for help, and because he is still the same Jesus, he is still at hand to comfort.

The man who went to Jesus to tell him that the disciples had failed to heal his son with "a dumb spirit", said to him, "If thou canst do anything have compassion on us, and help us". Jesus instinctively seemed to feel his Father's pity for the sufferings of mankind and he always did and always will, respond to a heartfelt appeal; in the case of this lad, he healed him, pointing out to the disciples that this kind of healing could be done only after prayer and fasting, only after being near to the Father to absorb His pity and His grace. Until that is done our own hearts will lack the pity and the grace (the divine charm) to help others.

When Jesus and the disciples were on their way to Jericho after the proclamation of the purpose of his ministry two blind men who were sitting by the way-side cried out: "Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou son of David." The scribes and Pharisees may have been blind to the qualities of divine glory in Jesus-but not the sick, the maimed, the blind. They sought and found compassion and mercy and they were made free from the burdens of sin. The two blind men were given their sight "and they followed him".

John, at the outset of the ministry of Jesus, had caught the spirit of his life and teaching: in his record he said that when the Word of God became flesh and dwelt with men, "We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

Truth is not only knowledge of doctrine: it is knowledge of God and of Jesus; it is of a life full of compassion, grace and mercy which are the fruits of divine love. These will remain when knowledge of doctrine has vanished.

Jesus would not have been "the express image of God's person" if he had not manifested these qualities of glory. As the Father was, is and will be, so the Son; and as adopted children of the Father we have to manifest the family likeness. As Paul wrote to the Ephesians, we have to be "imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, even as Christ also loved you, and gave himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice in God for an odour of a sweet smell".

Perfection through Suffering

It was the selfless giving, the compassionate divine love that led Jesus to accept the "sufferings" which came to him as the result of the knowledge of his mission. But it was through these very "sufferings" that he was made perfect. With the weight of the world's agony of sin on his shoulders, and with his experience of the wickedness of men in high places he learned perfect obedience to his Father's will. "For it became him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the author of their salvation perfect through sufferings."

When we examine our own lives in comparison with that of Jesus who sacrificed so much for us, we ought to realize the magnitude of what he achieved and the meagreness of what we do in return. Yet nothing is more certain than that each of us is capable, in him, of achieving far more for him and for the Father who chose us. There is something heartening in Paul's confidence in this respect: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

We need to examine our thoughts, motives, words and deeds more closely, to see if we bear the divine family likeness. For example, most of us would endure some sacrifice for the sake of those whom we love, or hold in affection; but how many of us would suffer loss for the sake of people we do not know, or who may even be our enemies? How many of us could safely confess our secret faults to one another, or expect a calm and loving hearing if a difficult matter were brought before the ecclesia?

All these things would be possible if we all strove to bear the characteristics of the divine family; the characteristics borne by God, manifested by angels, seen at their best in Jesus who "tasted death for every man" and which should be bearing fruit in "the many sons". Of such, we are told, Jesus "is not ashamed to call them brethren . . ."

The reason for the Father's creation, in Christ, of a family of children who will selflessly serve Him and others, is that He may reconcile more people to Him through their lives and their teaching of the Gospel. The purpose of the Kingdom is very much the same: the immortalized saints will be able to manifest the divine characteristics of service on such a vast scale of love (as well as of discipline) that far more people will be incorporated in the "All in All" than would ever have been possible before. The whole world will be flooded with one message, and one religion, "the everlasting Gospel".

This is the ultimate purpose for which Jesus endured "sufferings"; this is the joy that he saw before him; this is the fruit which he knew would result from the glory of the Lord filling the whole earth. This is the joy and the glory on which we must set our eyes. But it can be realized only if we selflessly give ourselves in service to others, for this is the way of the family of God.

The Source of Strength

Our Lord and Saviour clearly marked the way for us and we have to follow him in word and in deed. But it would be foolish of us to believe that we could achieve such a joyous consummation by our own strength. It is even more true of us than of Jesus that of ourselves we can do nothing. It takes a long time, sometimes, for one to learn this.

Jesus lived in a constant and continuing communion with his Father, and he made it obvious that he could not conceive of doing anything that was not in accordance with his Father's will. He not only drew his strength from Him, but returned to Him for renewal when He was exhausted after healing people. One has only to read that extraordinary record of his prayer in John 17 to appreciate how real and close was the bond between him and his Father. And it is this "family" bond which we, also, have to strive to preserve.

This communion of family love still persists: the Father and Jesus are there to make sure that it is preserved, and finally to make it perfect. And Jesus "is able to succour them that are tempted" because he himself suffered

temptation, trial, anxiety, distress. He loved, died and rose to immortality not only to release men from sin but that he might help his brethren: "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous . . .," Poor Stephen, looking up to heaven in his dying moments, "saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God". It was as if Jesus wanted to reassure him that all was well: his eternal future was assured; his Lord stood as his Advocate at the Father's right hand to witness to the faithfulness of His servant Stephen who must, in spite of his suffering, have been comforted.

The Scripture record of this revelation has been preserved to reassure us also, so that although we cannot see what Stephen saw, we can believe that the one who "loved me and gave himself up for me" still "stands" to represent our cause, still pleads for forgiveness for our weaknesses, that we may be gathered into the completed family, to continue to manifest, in the Kingdom, the glory of the Father's love.

If we become truly conscious of the reality of this family unity which, in heaven is encouraged and manifested every moment of time, we shall be the better able, in our earthly concerns, to guard our tongues, to discipline our lives, and to give to and to serve all, whether the brethren and sisters or others in need, without respect of persons. It is this kind of living and serving that makes men "glorify the Father", and they glorify Him by their response to the Gospel.

It is astonishing how completely Jesus exemplified and taught the divinity of service: and how completely it belongs to the life immortal, as well as to the mortal. Think of his humble service in washing his disciples feet; recall his immortal grace in preparing and serving breakfast to his brethren who had been searching for fish all night; and then remember his benediction: "Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them."

Jesus in his life and teaching showed us something of the characteristics and the quality of "the way, the truth, and the life"; it is for us without deception or hypocrisy to accept them and strive to imitate them in our lives. He is our Lord; he has saved us from the dread consequences of sin; he is worthy of our deep thanks and praise. But there is no doubt that what pleases him most is to have us strive to walk in his way.

He is the first-born of a mighty family, and we are privileged to be members of it. We owe this honour to the Father who chose us, and "Unto him be the glory in the ecclesia and in Christ Jesus unto all generations for ever and ever. Amen."

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Chapter 24 LOOKING FORWARD IN AWE

IT is not easy to accustom ourselves to the idea that a moment will come, whether we are living or dead, when the true reality of the things we believe in will be made clear. For those of us who are alive the familiar pattern of daily living, in the corner of the world that is our home, will suddenly vanish. Paul pointed to this event in dramatic terms when he wrote "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we be ever with the Lord."

An Awesome Event

This will be an awesome event, greater than any in the history of the world thus far, for it will lead to the manifestation of the sons of God, a moment for which the whole creation waits. If we do not prepare for it now, we shall be given no time for it then, because we shall be "caught up" or, literally, snatched away by force.

It will happen during the day or night, depending on which part of the world we live in: we may be at work or play; we may be found in a situation or place in which we would prefer not to have been discovered. But in a second, with no opportunity for protest or objection, whether we are enthusiastic or lukewarm, hard-working in Christ's service or have left the Truth, we shall find ourselves in the grip of a power which is beyond our mortal knowledge.

Obviously our minds will be in a whirl of thought. Shall we like Lot's wife, be thinking of, or anxious about, what we are leaving behind? Shall we be stricken with anxiety about the welfare of our children, particularly if they are very young? Either they will be with us, or they will be in the care of the Father, for they are His "heritage". Whatever we may think, above all will be the consciousness of what Paul warned: "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."

We ought to be clear that if "we neglect so great a salvation" we shall dread the judgment because "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God". But if we strive faithfully as much as our ability will allow we are certain of a merciful judgment because Jesus excels in the divine qualities of compassion, grace, mercy and truth.

The most awesome aspect of this judgment is that we shall stand alone for his verdict. How a husband will long to defend the weaknesses of his wife, or a wife the defects of her husband! How each will yearn to efface, for the Lord's eyes, the blemishes in their children! All these things must be given serious attention now for they cannot be done then. The judgment will be a lonely and heartsearching moment, and many of us may long to put the clock back!

Whilst time and life remain to us we can rededicate our lives to Christ's service: we can help one another to strengthen those aspects of character in us that are unlovely and negative. The alternative neglect raises a horrifying prospect of rejection which, if we think about it, would appear almost incredible. Is there any one of us who could face with equanimity the possibility of Jesus saying to us, "I know you not"? This would mean a return to mortal life, to sorrow until its end. The very thought of this ought to stimulate us to greater faithfulness to the will of the Father, and to a greater love of one another.

The Sons of God

If the gathering of the dead and the living saints will be an awesome event, what of the glory of joining Jesus in power and judgment? The "snatching away" of the saints will be unseen by the world which, nevertheless, will quickly discover its loss; but the manifestation of the "sons of God" will be seen by all nations, particularly those gathered to battle "upon the mountains of Israel". It is here that the "shaking in the land of Israel" is to take place, and the judgment will be inflicted on the nations in terrible measure by "the Lord my God (who) shall come and all the saints with thee".

Ezekiel 38 and 39 and Zechariah 14 portray the appalling and merited destruction of the battling powers in God's chosen land. And it is only when He, through His chosen Son and saints has executed this judgment that "the house of Israel shall know that I am the Lord their God from that day forward".

There is little doubt that the first task of Jesus will be the recall of "all the tribes of the earth", that is, the twelve tribes scattered throughout the earth, so that the Apostles may be appointed to their promised thrones, and who better for this task than the saints who will administer all his royal decrees?

Then will go forward the work of reconstruction and re-building in Palestine, so that the throne of Jesus may be established and the law go forth from Zion "and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem". But national pride does not yield easily and it is more than probable that a confederation of nations will dispute the right of Jesus to exercise power in "the Middle East". Again, with Jesus, it will be the task of the saints "to rebuke many people" until the blessed time comes that the nations "shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks and nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more". It will not be the pleasure of God, nor will it be the joy of Jesus and the saints to have to execute such inevitable judgments, but it will be an exultation of glory when they see the earth at rest and at peace.

The next stage will be the most awesome of all; the sweeping away of poverty, the administration of a gigantic building project, the world-wide and equal distribution of food and clothing, the substitution of a common language, the establishment of such communications and travel throughout the earth that the men and women of the nations may go to Jerusalem from "year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts" at the "house of prayer for all people", and the preaching of "the everlasting gospel unto them that dwell on the earth".

The Purpose of the Kingdom

This last is the main purpose of the Kingdom rule, for the work of Jesus and the saints will be to teach men and women the knowledge of God, and to encourage them in service to Him and to one another, so that they may be prepared for the glory of the "all in all" in vaster numbers than ever before. Thus "the saints" of the Most High" will be in evidence in every city, town and village, and as the people whom they teach will be mortal the saints will need all the patience, understanding, compassion and mercy that the Father has exercised throughout history. This will be the kind of perfect service which will have had its seed in the imperfect mortal life; without these qualities no saint is fit for the Kingdom task.

Of Jesus it was said that "for the joy that was set before him (he) endured the cross, despising the shame and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God". The joy of Jesus began when he entered eternal unity with his Father. It will be multiplied in the glory of the saints, and it will be completed in the vast immortal host that will be the fruit of the Kingdom labour of the saints. All will be gathered to the Father, and all, including the Son, will then be subject to Him alone.

Whatever we have to endure today is little when compared with the glory of helping Jesus to further the divine purposes in this life and that to come, and it is by the richness of our characters, the unconquerable strength of our dynamic faith that we can radiate the light which Jesus said may persuade some to glorify God: and such a character and light can shine even from those confined to their beds!

The new life, then, is the school in which we learn to develop a balanced spiritual character, one that will not have extreme characteristics; one in which there will not be excessive exuberance in one direction and ill-judgment in another, but an imitation of the most beautifully balanced character in all history, the Lord Jesus Christ. Like the Apostle Paul we must believe in our hearts that "for us to live is Christ": because he is our hope of glory.

This sets us a very high standard of spiritual attainment, but the vision of entering the ineffable glory of perfect unity with the Father should stimulate in us such strength of conviction in our spiritual purposes, such love in service to the household of faith, such humility of mind in our relationships with one another and with all men, and such awe of the Majesty of the Father and His purposes that He in His mercy may consider us fit persons for His glory.

The Marriage of the Lamb

In the meantime we must pray, we must wait in patience for the coming of the Lord, and we must continue to work, for "the night cometh when no man can work". Therefore, let us look forward to the time when the heavenly multitude will exclaim: "Let us rejoice and be exceedingly glad, and let us give the glory unto our God, the Almighty: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And it was given unto her that she should array herself in fine linen, bright and pure: for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints . . .

Blessed are they which are bidden to the marriage supper of the Lamb."

References

1 Thess 4v16-17 RV, Psa 127v3, 2 Cor 5v10, Heb 2v3, Heb 10v31, Matt 25v12, Ezek 39v3, Ezek 38v19, Zech 14v5, Ezek 39v22, Matt 24v30, Matt 19v28, Isa 2v3, Isa 2v4, Zech 14v16, Isa 56v7, Rev 14v6, Dan 7v18, Heb 12v2, 1 Cor 15v28, John 9v4, Rev 19v7-9 RV